

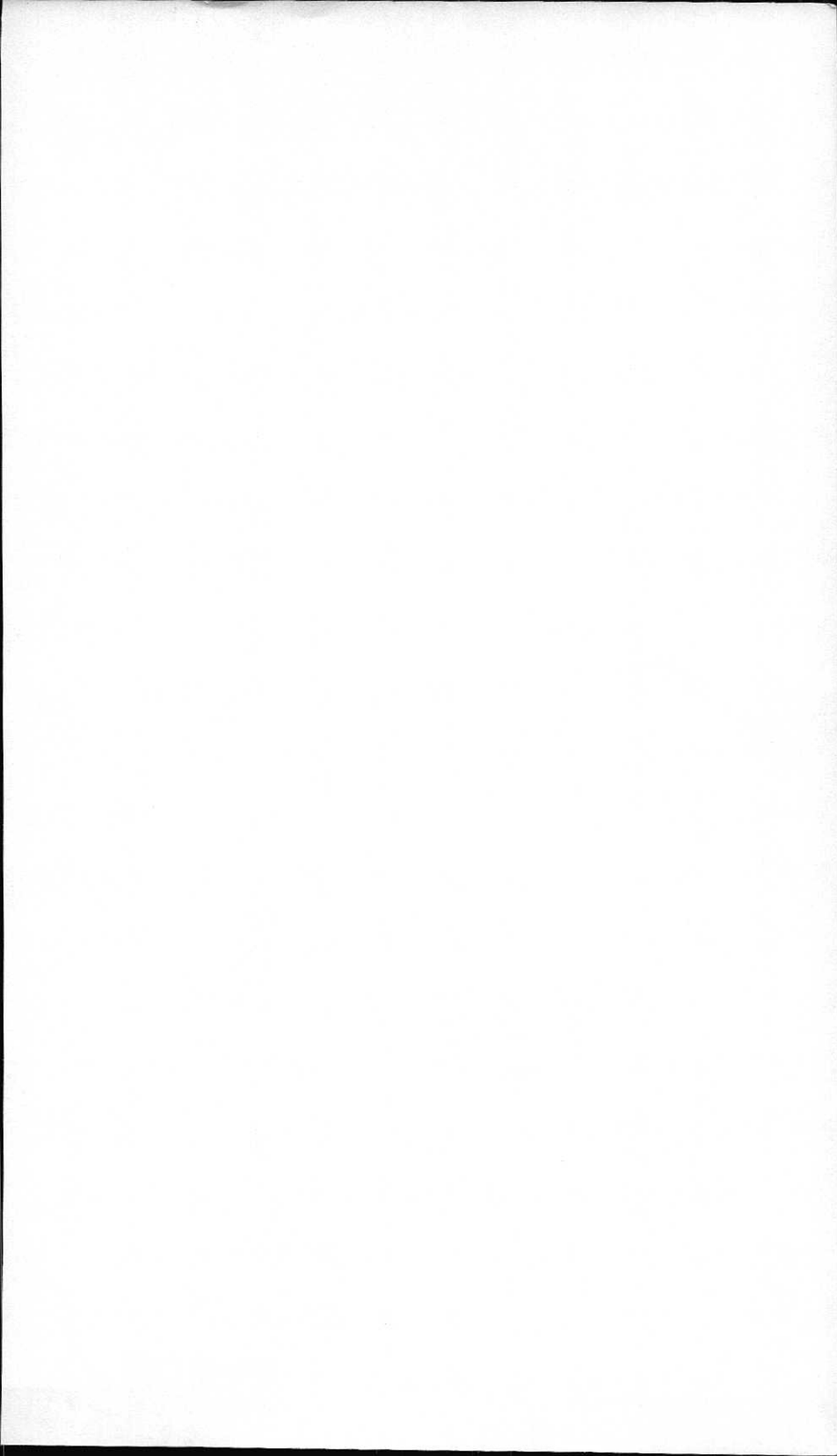
**IT'S
A
GREAT**

L I F E

By
Joe T. Odle

**DON'T
MISS
IT!**

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Charles Sumner



IT'S A GREAT LIFE...

— DON'T MISS IT !

**BY
JOE T. ODLE**

**Published By
CHRIST FOR THE WORLD PUBLISHERS
1215 W. 29th St. Orlando, Florida**

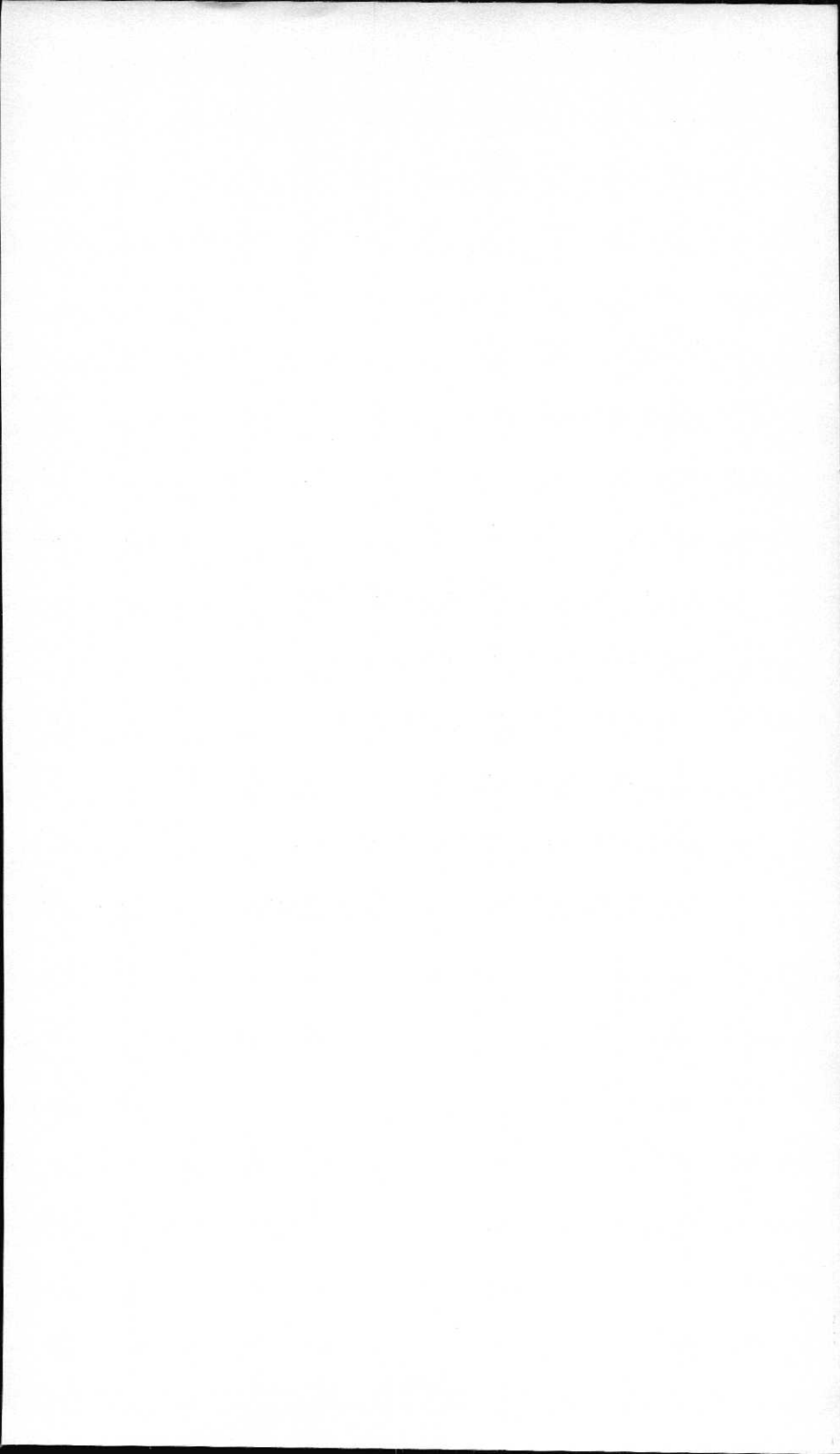
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To Mabel

Companion of life's blessed years,
Sharer in life's joys and burdens,
Inspiration and helper in life's tasks;
One of the truest Christians I ever
have known.

First Edition: June, 1967
Second Edition: November, 1967

Printed In the United States of America
By the Golden Rule Press
1215 W. 29th Street, Orlando, Florida



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FOREWORD

It's a great life --- Don't miss it!

Those are intriguing words. What is the great life to which they refer? What is the life which men should not miss?

It is the Christian life, the new spiritual life which is received in the new birth, which continues through the years on earth, and which is consummated in glory.

It is the life which is given in the regeneration wrought by the Holy Spirit when a man repents of sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as his saviour. It is the living of this life in Christ in the walk through life. It is the receiving of the final fullness of this life in heaven itself, when we are glorified with Him. It is an everlasting life, beginning at the moment of salvation and continuing through eternity.

It is a great life, a glorious life, the best possible life for man. Nothing which the world offers can compare with it. It is God's best gift to his greatest creature -- man. This does not mean that every person who becomes a Christian avails himself of all that God offers him in this life, but the provision is made, and God is ready to give to man his very best. Every man should accept the offer of God's salvation, and then begin to walk daily in such a manner that every provision of God can be his personal possession. The Bible speaks of the experience which makes this great life possible as salvation, and those who have the new life are spoken of as having been saved.

Salvation is man's greatest need and his most far-reaching experience. It is the central purpose of God's grace, and the culmination of his eternal plan. It is the reason for Christ's coming, and the only plausible explanation of Calvary. It is the heart of the great commission, and the central message of the church. It is the only means of eternal life, and the one way to final glory.

What is salvation? Without entering into theological wordiness, we would say simply that it is all that God does in redeeming a lost soul from the eternal ruin of sin, and translating him into His own kingdom of eternal righteousness. It would include all that is meant in regeneration, justification, sanctification and glorification. Salvation is an experience to be had, a life to be lived and a goal to be reached. We "have been saved"; we "are being saved"; we "shall be saved".

Despite the important place which the Bible gives to salvation, there are many today who would substitute another emphasis in their message. Many have rejected, or at least have diluted, the doctrine that man is a sinner and needs salvation. They have sought to replace the doctrines of the substitutionary death of Christ and the atonement with "another gospel". They no longer are concerned with "saving souls" but are busy with other religious activities, which may have some value, but are empty and vain in the light of eternity. Certainly, not all persons are doing these things, but enough are doing so, to deceive and mislead great numbers of people. Many are "trumpets" giving an "uncertain sound".

It is the purpose of this book to present the Bible's clear message concerning salvation, so that any lost person who reads may know his need for salvation, and how to be saved. The messages show salvation as man's greatest need, and as God's greatest gift. They reveal the glorious things involved in the wondrous salvation which God has provided. They show the saved person how to have assurance. They warn against neglect of salvation and show the eternal loss which comes to those who miss it.

The tragic fact is, however, that many people are going to miss this great life which God offers it, and others who have accepted it, are not going to know its true riches because they fail to yield their Christian lives completely to God. This book is written to plead with the lost to accept this new life; to encourage the saved to enter into the fullness of Christian living; and to urge preachers and other Christians to give a more earnest witness of Christ who is the way into this new life. If these things are accomplished, even in a small way, the author will feel well repaid for his efforts.

Joe T. Odle

INTRODUCTION

True originality comes from the depth of the soul. When a man speaks upon the basis of his deep and sincere convictions, he is being creative and original. This book has been written by a man who has consistently studied through the years. To know the Word of God and to be able properly to interpret it has been a consuming passion.

Joe T. Odle has majored in the study of ecclesiology and soteriology. To know the Biblical revelation pertaining to the church and its mission has been and is a major spiritual ambition. These messages reflect the depth of his study.

These messages are especially helpful in that they teach how best to use the doctrines of God's Word in heart-felt and heart-warming evangelistic preaching. It has been said that all evangelicals are not evangelistic. Here is evangelistic preaching at its best written by a man whom God has used in a mighty way over three decades. He writes without affectation even as he lives. His faith is simple, profound, Biblical, and founded upon deep personal experiences, for which the author never apologizes or seeks to explain. He is a product of his faith.

These messages will "prime the pump" of the preacher or teacher who seeks new ideas and ways by which he can tell the "old, old story" of Jesus and His love.

Chester L. Quarles
Executive Secretary-Treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention

CHAPTER ONE

A GREAT GRACE PROVIDED IT

Ephesians 2:1-10

The great life which God offers man is called salvation and is the theme of the entire Bible. That salvation is provided by the grace of God. Grace is that love of God which reaches out to sinful, undeserving man and provides redemption for him. One of the clearest presentations of this saving Grace of God in the entire Bible is found in the opening verses of the second chapter of Ephesians. Here we see God's great grace making provision for man's greatest need.

There are numerous ways that the passage can be outlined. For example, Dr. H. A. Ironside says that the opening verses present "the Christian's past, the Christian's present, and the Christian's future." I have chosen, however, to base the outline of this message upon a statement made several years ago in a book by that widely known Southern Baptist missionary, Mrs. Rosalee Mills Appleby. I do not even remember the name of the book, for she has written many, but somewhere in one of her books is this statement, "Sin--how terrible; Grace--how marvelous; the Gospel--how glorious; Time--how short; Eternity--how long." As we study this Ephesian passage, we shall see that the first three phrases present the great spiritual truths taught therein. However, we shall change the wording of the third phrase to "Salvation--how wonderful."

I. SIN--HOW TERRIBLE!

These are strange words in a modern world. Sin--terrible? The world would have men believe that sin is smart, attractive, fascinating and enchanting. The idea that sin is terrible is sneered at, scoffed, and ridiculed. Even many Christians smile at sin, condone sin, and indulge in sin. Despite all of this, however, sin is terrible. Always it has been terrible. It is terrible today. The Bible reveals how terrible sin is. Moreover, its disastrous results are seen in world history, past and present.

In this Scripture, there are three pictures of sin which reveal just how ruinous it is. The first verse says sin is death. Paul says, "And you hath he quickened (made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins." This reveals the sinner's state. He is dead unto righteousness. He is separated from God. There is not one thing that he can do to earn or deserve salvation. Spiritually he is dead. All of us know the meaning of death. Death is separation. Loved ones who are dead no longer can walk with us or talk with us or have fellowship with us. Even though we can have victory over death through Jesus Christ, yet, as far as our relationships in this world are concerned, death is the divider. It brings a separation which is fearful and dreaded. So also spiritual death separates from God. Sin has brought a chasm between God and man, so that man cannot walk with God, serve God, obey God, do God's will or please God, until he is made alive. As a sinner, man is dead. Sin is spiritual death.

The second verse gives another picture of sin. Here sin is an act. It is disobedience to the will of God. It is obedience to the devil himself.

While men are dead as far as walking with God is concerned, they are very much alive in their walk with the devil, and in sin. The verse says, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Here is the lost person walking the world's way. As we look at the world about us, we are very conscious that the world's way is not God's way. The world does not walk in God's will and God's purpose. Instead, there is rebellion against God. There is the broad way which Jesus described as leading to destruction, and as we see men and women of this world cursing and lying and blaspheming and doing the many evil things that they do, we must admit this is not God's way. Yet, men are walking in that way. The verse tells us more. It says that men are walking "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This is the devil himself, and lost people are walking in his way and doing his will. One need only look at the hate, deceit, dishonesty, drunkenness, murder, licentiousness and all of the other evil things going on in the world, to be forced to acknowledge that Paul is right when he says that men are walking in the devil's way. But someone may say, "Wait! Don't classify me with these evil people of the world. I am not walking the devil's way. I am living a good life." Let me answer that person quickly. "You are doing the thing that the devil wants you to do more than anything else in the world. You are committing the one sin which, above all others, Satan wants you to commit. He is not concerned that you

become a thief, or a murderer, or a drunkard. There is just one thing that he wants you to do, and that is to reject Jesus Christ. When you reject Jesus Christ, you are committing the greatest sin in the world. You are doing the thing the devil wants you to do above all else. Certainly you are walking the devil's way. Sin, then, is an act. It is transgression. It is disobedience to the revealed will of God.

This passage tells us something else about sin. The third verse says that all of us, before we were saved, had our manner of life "in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Here sin is seen as being in our nature. By nature, we are the children of wrath, the children of sin. The desires of our flesh in our natural state are evil, and not godly. We "go astray as soon as we are born, speaking lies," the Bible says, and it is very evident that the nature of individuals is to do evil rather than to do good.

When my children were small, they sometimes objected to my using this illustration. I would say, "My children are not little angels." That does not mean that I did not love them, as much as other parents love their children. One of my children is now in heaven, a young preacher who was called of God early in his ministry to enter into the heavenly realm. My other child is now married and has a lovely Christian home, and is an active worker in the Lord's service. But they were not little angels. They were little Odles! They had their father's nature in them. He had received that nature from his father, and so on, all the way back to Adam.

Every child coming into this world comes with a depraved nature. He is not born good, to become evil only because of the influences with which he comes in contact. He is born with an evil nature. This does not mean that the little child dying in infancy is not saved. God's redemption has provided a covering for the Adamic guilt so that no person is lost because of that, but must answer to God for his own guilt. Nevertheless, because of that very Adamic nature, he is a sinner, and he becomes accountable when he is old enough to answer to God for himself. Why is the whole universe under the curse of sin? The Bible says because we have the nature inherited from our fathers. Romans says, "In Adam, all die."

Let us consider another simple illustration. Suppose you go out to a wilderness area and find a baby rattlesnake, securing him the very moment that he is born. Do not allow him to be around or be influenced by any other snake. Bring him into your home and put him in a box surrounded by cotton and flowers and perfume. Feed him on honey or delicacies. Take care of him, and treat him with love and tenderness. Notwithstanding all of this, the day will come when he will shoot forth that forked tongue and there will be death in his strike. Why? Because he is a rattlesnake by nature. Why does the whole world go astray? Why do men do evil? Why is sin universal? It is because men are by nature the children of wrath.

Thus, this passage presents three truths concerning sin. It is a state, dead unto righteousness. It is an act, disobedience to God and obedience to the devil. It is a nature, enmity toward God. These statements in themselves

are enough to tell us how terrible is sin. But they are not all that the Bible says concerning it. Other passages tell us that sin is transgression of the law, that all unrighteousness is sin, that rebellion and stubbornness is our attitude toward God is sin. The Bible does not cover sin in any life, but reveals it, and the record of the Bible shows us how it toppled rulers, destroyed homes, broke hearts, cursed lives, twisted minds, and blasted hopes. It degrades character, it blights and damns souls. This is true in the Bible. This is true in the life about us. Sin has brought every curse that the world has known. It still debases and degrades and destroys and dooms and damns. Look about you. See the unhappiness in the world. See the tears in the world. See the sorrow in the world. Read the newspapers and magazines, and know that the curse of sin is in the world. And as you look at it, surely you will not deny that sin is terrible.

Many years ago, I preached in the penitentiary at Eddyville, Kentucky. I stood before more than a thousand men, gathered in a chapel on a Sunday morning, every one of whom had been found guilty of some crime. In their faces one could see the tragedy and sorrow and heartbreak of sin. After speaking to them, I was led down a long corridor and through an iron gate, down some steps and then down another corridor and through another gate, until I stood in death row. I was told that there were six men awaiting the hour when they would walk across that hall and into the room just behind me, and sit down in the electric chair. How my heart was moved with a desire to have a message of truth to help those men. After

speaking to them, we went into the death cell. I asked if I might sit in that electric chair, and I was given permission to do so. I placed my arms on those straps used to strap a man to the chair. I pulled the hood down partially over my face. (The hood is pulled down when men sit in that chair.) As I sat there, I said to myself, "God help me to preach, to give a message to men, so that others will never have to come to this place." After leaving the death row, we went back to the prison entrance. There I saw, waiting to come in, fathers and mothers and wives and children. In their faces were the marks of grief and sorrow that sin had brought as it had put their loved ones behind those stone gray walls. I came away from that place that day with my heart heavily burdened because of the meaning of sin in this world. Anything that would bring men to a place like that is terrible.

Is sin terrible? Stand by the open grave. Stand in the courtroom. Stand in the broken home. Look at the lives about you, but do not stop there. Look at sin in the light of eternity. See men facing the wrath of God. See a judgment when men must give answer to God for their lives, for their sins. See eternity in an everlasting hell, and you will know that sin is terrible. If that does not convince you, look at the cross. Look there until you see that God had to send His own Son to die for our sins, in order to save us from this terrible, awful curse. The measure of the depth of the ruin of sin is seen at Calvary. Yes, this passage of Scripture is right, and our missionary friend was right when she wrote, "Sin--how terrible!"

II. GRACE--HOW MARVELOUS!

Thank God this passage of Scripture does not end with verse 3. There is something more, and that we must read. We see the words, "But God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us." "But God"--are there more meaningful words in the Bible? Men, dead in sin--"but God." Men walking in the devil's way in rebellion against Him--"but God." Man, by nature a sinner, lost, condemned, deserving hell--"but God." What kind of a God is this? This passage says, "He is rich in mercy." Certainly the Bible tells us that God is a God of wrath, but it also tells us that He is a God of love and of mercy. This verse says that He is rich in mercy and that He loved us with a great love. This is spoken of as grace. The next verse says that He "even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED." the eighth verse says, "For by grace ye are saved."

The Bible speaks often of the grace of God. We read in Titus 2:10, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." We read in Romans 5:20, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." What is grace? Grace is the unlimited and unmerited favor of God to the utterly undeserving. Grace is God's bestowal upon us the very opposite of what we deserve. Grace is God reaching down and redeeming a hell-deserving sinner. Grace is God's overflowing love toward his fallen, helpless, and undeserving creature. Griffith Thomas said, "Grace is God's mercy pitying, God's wisdom planning, God's power preparing, and God's love providing redemption for men." Grace is

that love and mercy of God which reaches down to provide redemption for us.

Long ago I heard a wonderful story about the grace of God. It is said that in an English mission one night a poor, half-drunk man wandered in and sat down to get the warmth of the building. As he listened to the message, a worker sat down by him, slipped his arm around him and said to him, "My friend, God loves you." He answered quickly, "No, no! You don't mean me. God couldn't love me." The worker insisted, but the man said it could not be. "God could not love a sinner such as I." As the worker tried to tell him that God's love was given to him, he said. "Come with me." They went out of the mission, down a street, up a stairs on an alley, and into a room. There was not a stick of furniture in the room, just a pile of rags on one side, and a pile of straw on the other. Broken windows were there, and dirt. The man said, "This is my home. At one time I lived in a great mansion on a well known avenue, but now I live here. I have broken every law that God ever made, and my sinful living has brought me to this. No, God could not love a creature such as I." The mission worker opened the Word of God, and began to read of God's love and mercy, and of His great redemption. On his knees this man cried out to God for forgiveness, and the Lord gloriously saved him.

A few weeks later, Dr. R. A. Torrey was conducting one of his London campaigns. C.A. Alexander was leading the music in the great hall. As he led the congregation, suddenly he stopped the singing and said, "Wait a moment. There's a man in the back of the hall who is

singing with the light of heaven in his face. I do not know who he is, or what his story is, but I want him to come and tell us the testimony of his heart." It was the man who had learned in the mission of God's great love, and with radiant heart and face he told of how God had saved him, of the great redemption that had come into his soul. Truly, the grace of God is marvelous in that it would save a man like this, or save me, or save you. The story of the reach of that grace could be told a million times, yea, many millions. Every experience of salvation is an experience of the grace of God. Truly we can say "Grace--how marvelous!"

III. SALVATION--HOW WONDERFUL!

Our scripture not only presents the terrible-ness of sin and the marvel of grace. It goes on to reveal the wonder of the salvation God's grace has provided. Verses 5 and 6 tell us of the meaning of that salvation in the present time, and verse 7 tells us of that salvation in the future. The remaining verses of the section tells us of the wonder of its availability to all sinners everywhere.

It is a wonderful salvation because of what it does for us in this world. First, we are made alive, we are raised from the dead. The passage says that even as God raised Christ from the death of the grave, so He has raised us and made us alive from the death of sin. We are the children of God. We are born again. We receive God's nature. No longer are we separated from God. We are made alive in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, we are told that we have been "raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The word

translated "heavenly places" is used a number of times in the book of Ephesians. It does not mean the heaven of the future for that is in the next verse. It means the spiritual realm into which we are lifted when we become the children of God. We are raised from the death of sin, from the walk of the world, and from the way of evil, and we are made to sit together in the spiritual realm right here on this earth. It can be called "heavenly places" because it is a foretaste of heaven. We sit together in heavenly places as we build Christian homes, as we walk with Christian friends, as we work in Christian churches, as we sit in services where the Word of God is preached and where Christians worship Him and serve Him. We are in "heavenly places" as we see others coming to Christ, and as we find God's blessing in our lives and in our work day by day. How wonderful to read, "Raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places." If our salvation were for this world only, it still would be a great salvation, a glorious and wonderful salvation, and it would be worthwhile to become a Christian just to have the blessings of God and riches of God's grace here in this world. How often we've heard the song, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather have Jesus than riches untold." And how true that is, because in Jesus Christ life is different, life is rich, life is full, life is Christian, because we have Christ in us.

However, this is not all that salvation does for us. God saves us not only for this world, but also for the world to come. Sometimes people speak as if our only emphasis is on other-worldliness. That is not true. We are

interested in living for God in this world, but also we are interested in that which is in the future. We are to spend a few years in this world. We shall spend eternity somewhere else. How wonderful to know the place which God has prepared for us in eternity. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." This passage in Ephesians tells us that in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. "In the ages to come," the EXCEEDING riches--we have the riches of God's grace here. There we'll have the EXCEEDING riches. How wonderful to walk the streets of glory which He has prepared for us. How wonderful to come before Him and see Him face to face. The Bible says we'll be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. How wonderful to know that we can walk with Christian friends and loved ones over there. I believe if we had a full understanding of the true, wonderful glory God has prepared for us, we would be anxious for heaven. We would be ready to go.

My father was a country Baptist preacher, and my son was a Baptist preacher. Both of them are in heaven now. My father went there when I was just a little boy. My son was called home when he was just twenty years of age, in the very beginning of his ministry. Some day, when God has called me to join them there, I expect to walk the streets of glory arm in arm with my father and my son and, perhaps, for a few thousand years, we'll talk of the marvelous grace of God in saving us, of the wonderful redemption that we have in our Saviour, and the privilege He gave us to preach His

gospel. Together we'll go and kneel at His feet and thank Him for the great, glorious salvation that He gave us. Oh, yes! It is glorious to think of that day and that eternity, when together with all the redeemed, we'll be there forever. Salvation is wonderful.

This wonderful salvation is available to any sinner in the world. Notice His word--we receive this salvation as a gift of grace. It is not of works. It is the gift of God. You cannot earn it. You cannot live a life good enough to receive it. It has to come as a free gift accepted--yours without price, when you repent and believe, when you trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. When you do that, then God does His regenerative work in your heart and you are saved. All you can do is repent and believe, and when you do, He does His work in you, and you become His workmanship, created in Christ, to live for Him, to serve Him, and to work for Him. How glorious this great salvation!

One of the great soul-winning experiences of my life came when I was a pastor in Kentucky. One day the county jailer, who was one of my members, called me, and I had the beginning of an experience that revealed to me the true meaning of the grace of God. The jailer told me that there was a man in jail who wanted to talk to a Baptist preacher, and asked if I would come down and meet him. Of course, gladly I went, and there I met a man whom I shall call Bill Jones. That is not his name. I refrain from using it because Bill still lives. I see him once in a while. He is still giving a great witness of the grace of God. Bill was in Paducah jail, having come to that tragic experience be-

cause he had given a string of bad checks in a number of places. Bill was a Jew. He did not believe in Christ at all as the Messiah or the Saviour. His life had been anything but a godly life, because he had not even lived up to his Jewish religion. Now his acts of sin and evil had brought him to Paducah jail. But something had happened in Bill's life. He had met a young Baptist woman in a city in another state, and this young woman had won his heart. Now when Bill was in jail, she had written some of the strangest love letters I've ever seen. Bill showed me one or two of them. Among other things, she was saying to him, "Bill, your greatest need is not to be delivered from Paducah jail. Your greatest need is to be delivered from the bondage of sin. You need to be saved. You need to know Jesus Christ as your Saviour." She had sent Bill some tracts and a New Testament. He had been reading them, and now he was interested and concerned. I came to the jail. In my visits, I talked to him about the Saviour. I opened the Bible to try to show him that the Messiah which he, as a Jew, talked about, was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was my Saviour, and wanted to be his Saviour. We read many passages of Scripture. We prayed together. One day when I walked into the jail and looked at Bill through the bars, I could see something had happened. He reached through and put his arms around me and said, "I know now, Brother Joe, what you and Mary mean when you talk about being saved. Last night, down on my knees, here by this jail bunk, I repented of sin and asked God to forgive me and save me, and I believed in Jesus, and I know that He

is the Messiah. He is the Saviour, and I am saved."

A talk with him revealed how true his testimony was, that something had happened in his life. The circuit judge was Judge Joe Price, a great Christian and fine Baptist layman in Paducah. Mary came to talk to him, and I talked to him. He accepted Bill's testimony that he had been saved and said he would give him a chance, that he would file the charges away if the money could be raised to pay the checks. That was done, and Bill was released from jail. He went back to Mary's city. He was baptized into one of the churches there, and he and Mary married. Time passed. I left Paducah. The war came. I was pastor in Crystal Springs, Mississippi. One day I picked up a Training Union magazine, and turning through it, suddenly I read the outline under a photograph, "The Bill and Mary Jones Adult Union, in the Baptist Church in .". I looked, and there in the center of the picture was this couple--the friend I had met in Paducah jail, and the girl who was instrumental in bringing him to Christ, and who had married him. They were now working in a war industry in one of the great cities of the South, and in one of the churches they had led in the formation of an Adult Union for younger couples, and that union had been named after them. I bowed my head in prayer thanking God for His grace, that could take a man out of Paducah jail and make him a great witness for God. Bill and Mary still are witnesses for God. They are serving and honoring Him with their lives, with their testimony, and seeking to win others of the

Jewish race, as well as other sinners, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, here was a picture of "Sin--how terrible! Grace--how marvelous! and Salvation--how wonderful!"

CHAPTER TWO

A GREAT SACRIFICE PURCHASED IT

II Corinthians 5:21

The great new life which God has provided for sinful man, was purchased at an awful price -- the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the cross. To comprehend God's glorious salvation one must understand the Bible teaching concerning the cross. No theme is discussed more often in the Bible for it is mentioned more than 300 times. The cross of Jesus Christ is central in the Word of God. The Old Testament points toward the cross, while the New Testament reveals it, and then points back to it.

The cross must be central in preaching, in theology, in teaching and in witness if the church is to have a message of redemption for a lost world. We live in an hour when many are saying that the church should abandon a "slaughter-house" theology and a "blood" religion. They would call men to quit proclaiming the death of Christ for the redemption of men, and substitute for it the message of the love of God. Our answer is that we cannot reveal God's love without preaching the cross. We cannot tell men how to be saved without preaching the death of Christ for their sins.

Let us consider a text which explains why there had to be a cross. Sometimes we talk about the cross, read about the cross, sing about the cross, and hear sermons about the cross without knowing its real meaning. We put crosses on church buildings, and use the cross as a part

of the architectural design of our buildings. Some people wear a little cross on the lapel of the coat or hanging from a chain around the neck. What does it all mean? Why did there have to be a cross? Why could not God have saved men in some other way?

In the fifth chapter of II Corinthians, the twenty-first verse, is a statement which to me seems to make very clear why there had to be a cross. After looking at that, we shall consider many other passages of scripture as we think on this truth.

II Corinthians 5:21--"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

I. THE SCENE

God hath made Christ to be sin or a sin offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. To make clear the meaning of those words, I want you to use your imagination a little and imagine that you are looking at the actual scene of the cross of Jesus Christ.

As you go out the north gate, actually the northeast gate, of the City of Jerusalem, having left the Temple area behind, you find a hill. It has been cut now for there is a highway there between it and the wall. But there is a hill, and there on that hill is an old cemetery. Down below that hill, on one side, is that area which is known today as Gordon's Tomb. There is an open tomb, and there are the caves in the side of the hill that make it look like a skull--the place of the skull. Many Christian leaders and scholars believe that this hill is the actual

place where Christ was crucified, although there is another place inside the city walls where an ancient church has been built that is also said to be the place. But when you look at both places, you are convinced that surely outside the wall is where Christ was crucified.

On the day when he was crucified, Christ's cross was in the center, and on each side was a cross on which they nailed a criminal or a thief. As we carefully consider these three crosses, we can see the meaning of Christ's death.

II. SIN "IN"

Let us write some words over each of the crosses. First, let us write the word "in" over the cross on the right side and the one on the left. Each of these two men was a sinner and had sin "in" him. Moreover, you can write the word "in" over Joe Odle, too, for he also is a sinner. There is no truth in the Bible more clearly presented than that. The Word says, "all have sinned," and these two men hanging on crosses at Calvary represent the sinners of all ages.

We can turn to the book of Romans to find a clear presentation of the fact that all are sinners. In the third chapter, we read, "There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3: 10-12)

Further on, in this same scripture passage, we find a summary of the opening chapters of the book of Romans when we read in the 23rd

verse, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Now I recognize that there are some people today who do not like that passage. They are those who say, "Let us not talk about everybody being sinners. Talk about evil influences if you will, but not about such a doctrine as total depravity." Our answer is simply, "Look at the Word of God."

I remember an illustration that I heard somewhere long ago. It concerned a woman who came to a preacher who had used as his text the words of Romans 3:23. She said to him, "You preached something that is not true." He replied, "Is that so? What did I say that is not true?" She answered, "You said that all have sinned, and that is not so, for I am not a sinner."

"Well," replied the preacher, "If that is true and the Bible is not true, then I will cut the statement out of the Bible." With that he took his knife out of his pocket and started to cut his Bible.

The woman stopped him and said, "Oh, I do not want you to cut your Bible."

The preacher said, "Well, then I will take a pencil and write your name beside the verse and from now on when I read it, I will say, 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, except Mrs. _____.'" "Oh, no," the woman quickly replied, "I wouldn't want you to do that." "But I will do it," said the preacher, "for if you can say that God is mistaken, and that there never has been an evil thought, nor a lie, nor an evil deed in your life, and you can look God in the face and say to Him that you have fulfilled His will perfectly every moment of your life, then I must not preach again that

all have sinned."

"Oh, but I cannot say all of those things," the woman answered slowly. "Then," said the preacher, "the Bible is true after all, for if you cannot say those things, then the verse is right and you stand before God just as a sinner." "Pray for me," the woman said.

It is true! All have sinned. There is none righteous before God. Step on the scales of God. Let your life be measured by the standards of God. You cannot say that you are without sin, nor can any other person who ever has lived, except the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The words placed above these crosses are true. Sin is "in" them.

III. SIN "ON"

We can look more closely at these men and realize another truth concerning them. Let us write another word above those crosses to describe that truth. These men not only had sin "in" them. Sin also was "on" them. Write the word "on" above the right hand cross and the left.

What does that mean? We read in the Word of God, "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15) We read such words as are found in Revelation 21:8, "But the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars . . ." Go back and read again before we continue. He said, "and the unbelieving"---"shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." The wages of sin is death. This does not mean mere physical

death. Death is not mere cessation of existence nor merely leaving this present life. The Bible tells us that there is an eternal death, a second death, and that sin is so awful and the curse of sin so great, that God must punish sin with death. These men on the cross had sin "in" them, and the awful curse of sin "on" them. They not only were dying a physical death, but also were about to be swept into eternity to face an eternal death. Sin's penalty of death was "on" them, and it is "on" me and "on" you, and "on" every other sinner who ever has lived or is living today. Sin is "in" us and "on" us.

IV. SIN "NOT IN"

Now look at the middle cross. Here is another hanging in tragic crucifixion. What must we write above him? We must write the words "Not in" above his cross. Our text says, "For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." These words refer not to us but to him. Jesus "knew no sin." This does not mean that Jesus did not know what sin was. He certainly knew more about sin than any other person who has lived upon this earth. He knew fully the meaning of sin with its awful power and penalty and ruin, but never had there been one sin in him. Never had one lie gone forth from his lips, never had there been one evil thought, and never had there been one second of disobedience to the perfect will of God. He was without sin. The Bible declares this over and over and it has to be true. Jesus Christ could not be the Saviour of sinners if he had been guilty of one single sin himself. Had he been simply an ordinary man with a

human father and a sin-cursed nature, he would have had sins of his own for which atonement was needed, and he could not have been the sinless offering for the sins of others.

Christ was without sin. Judas said, "I have betrayed innocent blood." (Matthew 27:4) The writer of Hebrews says He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) And our text says, "who knew no sin." Let us then write above Jesus the words "Not in" for he was the Son of God who had come to earth. He was one with the Father in glory before the world was, and in his incarnation he was God come to walk among men. And as he walked among men, he was without sin. There was no sin in him. We also could write the word "righteous" above him, for he was God's perfect righteous one in every way.

V. SIN "ON"

If Christ has no sin "in" him, why is he dying? Listen to the words of the text. "He (that is God) hath made Him (that is Christ) to be sin for us." What does that mean? It means that God was dealing with him as if he were a sinner. He was the substitute, and, as a substitute, the sins of others were laid upon him. We must write above his cross the word "on" for, even though he was not guilty of sin, the curse of sin was laid upon him. The cross was not a martyr's bier. The cross was not an accident in history. A man who claimed to be a preacher is reported to have said once in a Mississippi pulpit that the Romans killed Jesus, so God had to raise him from the dead. If he said such a thing, that man should go back and read his Bible. He would find that it

was in the purpose and plan of God from eternity that Christ should die upon the cross for the sins of the world.

Is this great doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ true? One needs only to read the Bible. How can one fail to believe Isaiah 53:5-6: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." My sins were laid upon Jesus. Your sins were laid upon Jesus. Why? Because every sin must be punished with death. God is not an indulgent grandfather who sees the disobedient child, but says, "You are guilty, but it is all right. I will forgive you." No! God is a holy and righteous and just God, as well as a God of love, and he must deal righteously with sin. That means sin must be punished. Remember, we read, "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) That means that every sin that I have committed and every sin that you have committed must, before it can be forgiven, have its penalty paid. So He hath laid on Him, on Christ, your sins and my sins, the iniquity of us all.

We could read many other passages, but I want you to hear just two or three others. In the book of I Peter we read in the twenty-fourth verse of the second chapter, "Who his own self bare our own sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." And in I Peter the third chapter, we read in the eighteenth verse, "For Christ

also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." Notice those words, "the just for the unjust." "The just" once suffered for sin "for the unjust . . . that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." I could read on and on. There are many other passages that tell us this truth--that Christ on the cross was bearing the sins of men and taking the punishment of sin for others as a substitute. When we read those words of Jesus on the cross, heard when he cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?", I think it seems to be very clear it was the first moment in all eternity that Jesus Christ could not look on the Father's face. Separated from the Father--but in that moment your sins and my sins, the sins of the whole world--all the crime, all the evil, all the lies, all the hatred, all the murder, all the sin of all men of all the ages was laid on him and there God was allowing him to die for it all. He hath "made Him to be sin for us." We wrote the words "Not In" over Jesus, but we also must write the word "On". Sin was laid "on" Jesus.

VI. SIN "NOT ON"

Look at the rest of the text: ". . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." How can it be? In Luke's record of the crucifixion, we hear one thief say to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Somehow, there on the cross a dying thief, even despite the pain and suffering of an awful death, had faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith, like your faith and my faith, was accepted. As that sinner repented of sin and believed in

Christ, he was saved, and Jesus said, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." That man's sin was forgiven. So we can take that word "On" that is over him and mark through it and bring it over to the word "On" which is above Jesus. This thief believed, and although he died a physical death, he did not have to pay the penalty for his sin. His sin was laid on Jesus so that it was no longer on him.

There was a day when this writer believed in the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. At that moment when he repented and believed, his sins were laid on Jesus and the penalty was paid by the Lord Jesus Christ. When you believed, your sins were laid on Him, and they are no longer on you. Wonderful truth, wonderful revelation--Christ died for our sins. When we believe, the penalty of our sins is laid upon Him.

VII. RIGHTEOUSNESS

But the text says something more, "... that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." So we can draw a line from the word "not in" which could be interpreted "righteous" over Christ's cross, over to the cross of the dying thief. The righteousness of Christ was credited to him and he became a righteous man in the sight of God. How could it happen that a man who was a thief, a man who was being crucified by his government, could stand before God as a righteous man? He did not have the opportunity to go out and live a righteous life. He had not lived a righteous life before, and yet am I saying that he would stand before God righteous? Yes! He will stand righteous before God in the same way that I will stand righteous before

God, or that you will stand righteous before God. Paul said, "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:9) Christ's righteousness was credited to him. Christ's righteousness was credited to me. Sins are forgiven and righteousness is credited to us--that is why we can stand before God--saved. The penalty has been paid. We are the children of God in Him.

VIII. NECESSITY

Look at the other thief. Christ died for him, too, but he rejected that sacrifice. He did not believe. He could have trusted Christ, but he did not trust. He could have believed, but he did not believe, so he had to go out into eternity not only with the curse of sin "in" him, but also with the curse of sin "on" him, simply because he had not accepted God's provided redemption. He did not accept the payment for the penalty of sin which God offered. Here, then, is the principle. Sin's penalty must be paid. God has provided the way that it can be laid on his Son Jesus Christ, and through Christ we are saved. That is why there was a cross. Certainly it was to show the love of God, but it is far more than just an expression of love. Surely it shows the mercy of God, but it is far more than just mercy. It is God's provision of a plan, a means, a way whereby He can be just and still be the justifier of the sinner. If God were just in his dealings with me without the cross, then I would have to go to hell; but God can be just and deal with my sins because they are laid on Christ and then he can be the justifier of me through the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the meaning of the cross.

There is a simple old story that partly illustrates this glorious truth. I use it sometimes with boys and girls to help to explain the meaning of Christ's death.

We are told of a mountain school where they had trouble keeping teachers. It was an area where the boys and girls worked all through the summer and most of the time in the winter, and went to school very little. Thus, some came to be full grown, yet continued in school. They had a practice that if they did not like what the teacher did, they would simply run him off. One day a young man came to the trustees and said, "I would like to be teacher of the school." The school board said, "How can you be a teacher? You are not big enough. You could not whip a single one of the students." He quietly said, "I think I can handle the school."

On his first day with the pupils he said, "If we are going to have a school, we must have laws. What do you want to have as the laws for this school?" They put upon the chalk board: "You are not to steal." "You are not to lie." "You are not to fight." and several other rules. The teacher said, "A law is of no value if there is no penalty. What shall be the penalty?" The pupils talked about it awhile and decided upon ten licks with the coat off. And school began.

Weeks went by--everything was fine. Then one day after recess a little girl came and said, "Teacher, somebody stole my lunch." The teacher was very sorry and he expressed his regret to the class, but he said, "Somebody has broken one of our laws, and we must find who it is." He began to go down the rows of desks

asking different ones. Finally he came to a little boy named Johnny. "Johnny, did you steal Mary's lunch?" The little boy began to cry. The teacher said, "Come to the front, Johnny. You know the penalty. You know that you did wrong." The boy certainly was repentant, but you know repentance is not enough. Repentance is our part and faith is our part, but it has no value unless something has been done to make it acceptable. The sin is still there. Being sorry for it is not enough.

The little boy was sorry. The teacher said, "Son, you will have to remove your coat, because ten licks with the rod with your coat off is the penalty." Just as he raised his rod to strike the little boy its first lick, but before the rod fell, a large young man in the back of the room said, "Wait a minute, teacher." The teacher said, "What is the matter, Bill?" He said, "Teacher, will it be all right with you if I take Johnny's place?" The teacher said, "I suppose it will be all right. The law does not say that the guilty person has to pay the penalty. It doesn't say that there can't be a substitute. Will you take Johnny's place?" He said, "Yes, teacher, I'll take his whipping for him." The teacher said, "All right, but first Johnny will have to accept your offer. He will have to let you do it." The big boy came forward and little Johnny heard that news. It was such good news he could hardly believe it, and he said, "Bill, will you do that for me?" He said, "Yes, Johnny, I'll take your whipping." Little Johnny stood aside and big Bill stood there in his place. The teacher took the rod and laid on the stripes, the penalty was paid, and the little boy was free. You can be sure as long

as he lived, that lad never did get through telling people about his wonderful friend, Bill.

There was a day when I was a sinner. I stood guilty before God, with the guilt of sin in me and the penalty of sin on me. Jesus Christ said, "I'll take your place. I died for your sins on Calvary. Believe in me and you will be saved." And that day when I repented and believed in the Lord Jesus my sins were forgiven, and as long as I live I'll not get through telling about this wonderful Christ--that He died for my sins.

The cross is the one answer to man's needs. It is the one message to a lost world. Have you come to the cross? Have you trusted Christ as your Saviour? If you have not, you can come right now. The Christ who died for the thief on the cross, and died for sinners through the ages, died for you; but, you have to trust Him. You must accept Him. Will you do it right now?

An old song reads, "The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day, and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away."

Accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour today!

CHAPTER THREE

A GREAT EXPERIENCE PRECEDES IT

Acts 26:1-20

If God provides a great life through the cross, men need to know how to receive it, how it begins. What is the experience which is the beginning of the new life in Christ? How may any sinner in the world receive the gift, the wonderful gift, of new life in Jesus Christ? In other words, how is a person saved?

There are many texts which could be used for such a message. For example, we could use Acts 16:31, where the Philippian jailer asks the question, "What must I do to be saved?" and we have the answer in the words of Paul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And surely there is a wonderful revelation there on how to be saved.

Let us, however, go back further in the Christian witness than that. Let us ask that man who told the Philippian jailer how to be saved, to tell how he was saved. As we study this testimony, I think you will find that his conversion experience is like all of yours, all of you who are saved, except perhaps in one particular. I shall tell you later what that difference was. I am talking about Paul, and of his conversion experience.

Paul often told about how the Lord saved him. One of the finest ways to win souls or to witness for Christ is to tell how the Lord saved you. Just tell what the Lord did for you, and what happened to you. What a marvelous

testimony that is! Paul loved to tell that story. He told it when he was a prisoner. He told it when mobs were threatening to kill him. He told it on an occasion when he stood before a king. Instead of making a plea for his life, he simply told how the Lord saved his soul, and used that as a testimony to that king. Over and over, Paul gave the testimony of his conversion experience.

Paul's testimony is recorded in more than one place in the book of Acts, but I am asking you to look in the 26th chapter, at just a few verses of this record of his appearance before King Agrippa.

Paul's words are found in almost the entire chapter, but I would have us especially to consider verses 12-19. As we consider his experience, we find that it is that which all saved persons have had, except in one particular.

I. CONDITION

As we look at Paul's words, we consider first of all the apostle's condition. Paul said concerning himself, earlier in this passage: "My manner of life from my youth which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews which knew me from the beginning if they would testify that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

1. Here is a man who had been religious. Paul probably was far more religious than most of us ever will be, yet despite all of this, he was a lost man. He attended the synagogue services regularly. He probably made his offerings regularly to the priests and kept up the sacrifices and all the other required religious activities. But something was wrong in his heart.

He had not been born again. You say, "Wait a minute, preacher. That doesn't make sense. Can a man be religious and still be lost?" Yes. Being religious doesn't save us. We must be converted. We must have Christ in our hearts.

Paul describes that condition in the book of Philippians when he speaks of himself and says in the third chapter, these words, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching righteousness of the law, blameless." Now that means he had met all of the requirements of the law, and was even one of God's chosen race--the Jews! But listen to what he says, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

He was religious, but that did not make him a child of God.

Dr. H. A. Ironside tells this story in one of his books. He was on a train going from Chicago to Oakland, California. In the Pullman car he took some tracts out of his briefcase and gave them to his little son, who was with him, and told him to walk up and down the aisle and give the tracts to the passengers.

The little boy walked down the aisle and handed them here and there. After a few moments, a lady came and said, "Sir, I see you are a religious person."

He said, "How did you know?"

She said, "I saw your little boy giving out the tracts. I, too, am a religious person."

He said, "That's wonderful. How long have you been a Christian?"

"Oh," she said, "I always have been a Christian. I have never been anything else."

He said, "But when were you born again?"

She said, "I haven't been born again. I did not need to be born again. I grew up in a Christian home. I have always lived a Christian life. I have never done things wrong. I have always gone to church."

He said, "My dear lady, the Word of God says you must be born again."

But she said, "That didn't mean me."

She had religion, but knew nothing about Christ in her heart. Paul on the road to Damascus was a religious man. But as he looked back later, he realized how sinful he was, how awful his sinful life had been. He was religious, but lost.

2. Not only was Paul a religious man without salvation, but also he was self-righteous, without God's righteousness. He was a proud Pharisee, very proud of his position as a Jew. He had pride in his position as a Jewish leader, in his religious life, and in his offerings and his sacrifices. He had paid his tithes and offerings. He had a righteousness of his own. He probably felt, "I thank God I am not like other people. I am not like those sinners around me." Yet, though he was filled with

self-righteousness, he did not have God's righteousness.

Paul revealed this later when he prayed for the Jews. In the tenth chapter of Romans, he said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. But they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about the establishment of their own righteousness have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Paul said that the righteousness of man is not enough. The righteousness of good works is not enough. The righteousness of a religious life is not enough. You must have God's righteousness which is only in Jesus Christ.

Paul was a self-righteous man. He did not have God's righteousness. How about you? You may be the best man in this town. You may have lived a better life than any Christian. But all the righteousness and all the good works of your life cannot save you. You stand exactly as Paul stood. You are lost.

3. Paul also was sincere. He said in his testimony, "I thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth." He thought he was doing the right thing. He thought he ought to persecute the Christians. He thought he ought to destroy those who were followers of Christ. He was sincere, but one can be sincere and wrong. You can be sincere and still go to hell.

That woman over in India who takes her baby and throws it into the Ganges River that it may

be swallowed by the crocodiles as an offering to her god, is sincere, but that doesn't make the act right.

In Paducah, Kentucky, just before I lived there, one night in the Riverside Hospital, a nurse was ill and said to her roommate, "Get that bottle of medicine in the cabinet and give me some of it." This nurse in the semi-darkness picked up the bottle of medicine, poured some in a glass, gave it to the woman and she drank it. And in a moment, she cried, "What have you given me? What have you given me?"

She had picked up a bottle of poison, and the woman died. Now she was sincere.

"Oh," you say, "I think if a person is sincere, that is all right." But that isn't what the Bible says.

Paul was sincere. But he was lost.

II. CONVICTION

We have seen Paul's condition. He was just a lost sinner needing to be saved, but he came under conviction. I feel sure that as Paul was riding along the Damascus road on the way from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest the Christians in Damascus, he was doing some very serious thinking. He was disturbed in his own heart. How do I know that? Because of what the Lord said to Paul when he had fallen to the ground. The Lord said to him, "Why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Now this evidently is a reference to the oxgoad. The oxgoad was a short stick which was very sharp on one end and very heavy. As the ox driver was driving his oxen, and one of the team pulled in the wrong direction, not going where the

driver desired, he would take that goad and stick the ox in the side. The harder the ox pushed, the deeper was the hurt.

Evidently Paul was fighting the work of the spirit of God in his heart. He had come under conviction. Perhaps it began when Stephen was stoned to death and Paul stood by and watched. Stephen, the deacon, was being murdered and Paul, while the others were committing the murder, stood holding the murderers' coats and approving the action. As he stood there, he heard the testimony of this man who was dying for Christ.

I don't believe that Paul was ever able to get away from the testimony he heard on that day, and though he became bitter in persecution, I wonder if the voice did not ring in his ears again and again. Perhaps the Spirit also used the testimonies of other Christians whom Paul was persecuting. He had been going into their homes, and had been saying to them, "You give up Christ, or I'll take away your property or put you in prison." The Christians were saying that Christ was alive. They were willing to die for Him. They were willing to suffer for Christ. They were willing to lose their property for Christ. Somehow Paul was touched by that testimony of godly men and women who believed in the Lord and loved Him, and were not ashamed of their witness. I am sure Paul could not get away from it.

Perhaps he had listened to some preaching concerning Christ before he arrested the preacher and his hearers. Though he rejected the message, somehow the spirit of God was speaking to his heart and making him see the truth. Perhaps there were many who were pray-

ing for him. Even though Paul professed bitterness and hatred against Christ, down in his heart he must have been saying, "I wonder if I am right."

Have you had such an experience? Has some sermon touched your soul and you have felt in your heart, "I am the one who needs to trust Christ."? Have you looked at some Christian's life and said, "If I could be a Christian like that, I should like to be one."? Has the spirit of God spoken in a message you have heard? Maybe it was a radio message. Maybe it was Billy Graham preaching on television. Maybe it was just the reading of the Word. You knew that the spirit of God was dealing with you. This is conviction.

I can look back in my own experience to the time before I was saved. It seemed to me that every time I went to church, every time the preacher preached, he was preaching to me. There were sermons that sounded as if they were aimed straight at my heart. I began to be burdened about my soul. I knew I was a lost person. I knew I needed to be saved.

Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will reprove (convict) the world of sin." (John 16:8)

On that day, as Paul rode along, he must have been thinking about what he was doing to the Christians. Somehow, something was happening within him, and he was wondering, "Am I wrong? Am I mistaken? Is Christ really alive after all? Is this testimony true?" He was under conviction.

I have seen men and women under conviction in various meetings. I have seen tears in eyes of people with whom we had talked. I

have seen them as the concern was revealed in their faces. The spirit of God deals with men's hearts.

III. CONVERSION

We have seen Paul's condition. He was lost. Then we have seen how conviction came into his heart. Now we come to the conversion experience. As he and his party were riding along on the Damascus road, suddenly there was a light from heaven shining around them. Paul fell to the ground, and then looked up into the face of the Lord. Literally he saw with his eyes the Lord Jesus, for Jesus had a special purpose for him, and so he appeared to him in person.

This is the only difference between Paul's conversion experience and mine and yours. I did not see a light from heaven, nor did you. I did not have a personal appearance of Jesus to me, nor did you. But everything else about our experience was like unto his. When I was saved, the preacher held up Jesus as Saviour. He told me of God's love for me and of His sending His son to die for my sins. Christ was presented to me as the Son of God, the Saviour. While I could not look at him with physical eyes as Paul was able to do, I could look to him with spiritual eyes. I could see that He was the one who died for me. I could see that He was the Son of God.

Paul repented when the Lord Jesus revealed himself to him. He saw how wrong he had been. He saw how far astray he had gone in what he was doing. Immediately he believed. He said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" (Acts 9:6) There was complete sur-

render. There was no hesitation on his part. In that moment, Paul repented of all the things he had done, all the bitterness, all the hatred, all the opposition, he had had toward Christ. He changed from all of that. He saw what he had done and had been. Like the prodigal son, he "climbed over the fence in that moment, and headed for home."

That is exactly what every person on this earth who desires to be saved has to do. He must come face to face with Jesus. He must see Him as the Son of God, and realize that He is the Saviour whom God has provided. He must repent and believe. When I did that, the Lord saved me. When you did that, if you are a Christian, in that moment He saved you.

Paul rose to his feet a child of God. He arose a new man, with a commission. The Lord said, "Here is what I want you to do." It was revealed to him that he was to open the eyes of those in darkness. He was to preach the message of Christ, to turn other men from sin and to righteousness.

The Lord saved him, called him, and gave him his message.

Glorious was the experience of Paul, who in a moment accepted Christ, and had his whole life made new.

That is what it means to believe. That is what it means to be saved.

You ask, "What does it mean to believe in Jesus?" Exactly what Paul did. He saw, he repented, he believed, he trusted, he surrendered.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:31)

I heard Dr. J. B. Lawrence, long the execu-

tive secretary of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, tell the story of his conversion. He said that it took place in a little country church in Rankin County, Mississippi, not far from Jackson.

He said, "I was a boy attending a revival going on in that country church and as the preacher preached, he presented Christ. As he spoke, I saw that I was a sinner for whom Christ had died. The message made clear to me that I should repent and trust the Lord Jesus as my Saviour."

Dr. Lawrence said, "I stepped from the pew and started down the aisle. As I did, the Lord saved me."

He added, "By the time I reached the front, there was joy in my heart. There was peace because I had trusted Jesus Christ as my own personal Saviour."

Have you done that? God is ready to give this experience to every one of us. When we repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus, He saves us. He saves us all in the same way.

Billy Graham was a high school boy in Charlotte, North Carolina. He loved sports. He loved a good time. He was a church member, but knew nothing of an experience of salvation.

Dr. Mordecai Ham came to Billy's city to conduct a tent revival. Dr. Ham, who is now dead, was quite a sensational evangelist, but a most effective one, and a great preacher of the Word of God. A tent meeting was an unusual event in that community and some of the high school boys began to attend because it was unusual. It was being widely discussed in the community. Billy Graham and one of his buddies decided to go. They went to hear the sensa-

tional preacher, but things didn't happen exactly as they had anticipated.

Billy Graham decided that the preacher knew him, but he was mistaken. God knew Billy Graham was there, just as God knew Paul was on the Damascus road, and God had a purpose for Billy Graham's life. That night God gave Mordecai Ham a message that would bring conviction to the heart of that young man whom God wanted to use. Billy Graham and his friends, who came to laugh and, perhaps, to sneer, and to have a good time at the expense of the preacher, instead found their own hearts stirred and moved with a deep conviction of their lost condition.

Billy Graham was not saved the first night, but he went back again and again. The spirit of God was working in his heart, and finally one night when the invitation was given, he could not turn it down. He saw Jesus Christ, God's son, the Saviour, as the one he wanted to be the master of his life, as the one he wanted to save him from his sins. That night, through faith in Jesus Christ, he found the peace, the joy, and the salvation, which God gives to all men and women who repent and believe.

That night as he came near to the altar to profess faith in Christ, God changed his heart and made him into a new man in Christ whose life literally would change history.

Jesus saves! Jesus saves! Have you been saved? You can be, if you will trust Christ, even as Paul did, as Billy Graham did, and as tens of millions of others have done.

Is the spirit of God also dealing with you, even as He dealt with Paul and with Billy Graham? Open your heart to Him as others

have done.

Be saved, be saved now! It is that simple. It is that wonderful. It is that glorious. God will do His regenerative work for any sinner who accepts Christ as Saviour.

If you have not been saved, won't you come to Him now?

CHAPTER FOUR

A GREAT LOVE PROFFERS IT

Luke 15:1-24

The new life in Christ which God offers to man, is made possible because of the great love which God has for man. This love is revealed throughout the Bible, but no passage depicts it more clearly than Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son. This is one of the most beloved passages in all literature, but people studying it often miss its central truth of the love of the Heavenly Father for sinful men. Let us see that truth in this study.

In order to understand the parable of the Prodigal Son, one must turn back to the very first verse of the chapter where it is found, the fifteenth chapter of Luke. There we read, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." Jesus was preaching and teaching. The publicans, or tax collectors, for that was what the publicans were, were Jews who had contracted with the Roman government to collect taxes from the people. If you think we dislike tax collectors in this country, you should have seen how the Jews hated them back there. They were despised. Usually they were outcasts as far as Jews were concerned. Often they were a very dishonest group. And yet, here were the publicans coming to hear Jesus. Among the hearers, also, were the sinners. They were that group of Jewish people who were not coming to the Temple, not worshipping. They were looked upon as outsiders--

just an outcast crowd. But here they were, coming to hear Jesus. They were listening to Him, and some of them were being saved.

The second verse says, "The Pharisees and the scribes murmured saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." They were saying, "There is something wrong with this man. He can't be a religious teacher. He can't be a man from God. Why, look with whom He is associating. He is talking to these sinful ungodly people, these outcasts, and He is eating with them and He is going into their homes." In answer to their criticisms, Jesus gave a threefold parable to show that God receives sinners.

I. THE PARABLE

The first part of the parable is the story of the Lost Sheep. It tells the story of the shepherd going out into the storm and into the wilds to find the sheep that was lost. And Jesus said, "And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing, and calls his friends together and says to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Jesus then said to that group who were criticizing Him, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance"--ninety and nine just persons, who feel that they are so good and so fine that they don't need what I have to preach. But, there is joy in heaven over one man that turns from his sin and trusts in Me. I think in that first part of the parable, Jesus was showing the Son's part in salvation. He was saying, "It is true that Jesus Christ receives sinners."

Our lord gave the second section of the parable when He told the story of the woman who lost a coin. A woman having ten pieces of silver, lost one of them. Commentators say that this probably was a special silver collection that she had been given at her wedding, and she valued those coins above all her other treasures. But now one had been lost. The woman took her candle and her broom and diligently swept her house, seeking the lost treasure. When she had found it, she called her friends together and said, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." Jesus then added, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." It is as if Jesus had said, "I am talking to sinners. I am preaching to sinners and they are being saved." In this portion of the parable, I think Christ is referring to the Holy Spirit, and His part in salvation by seeking out the lost and searching for them and drawing them to the Lord.

Then the Lord tells the third part of the parable. This is the story of the Prodigal Son, and if I understand this story, its central teaching is that God loves sinners and will receive them in the same way that a father here on this earth would receive a prodigal son. He is saying, "Yes, God does receive sinners--men and women and young people whose lives are out in the world. God is ready to receive them and redeem them." Look at the story: "And He said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together,

and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he fain would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came unto himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry." The rest of the story is about the brother who, like the Pharisees, objected to this sinful son being received. We do not have time now to look at him. We want to see the great central truth of God's love for sinners and God's salvation for those sinners.

II. THE RUIN OF SIN

There are three or four things which can be seen here very quickly. First of all, we see in the story of the Prodigal Son the ruin of sin. This passage says that this son went into a far country. Where is the far country? It is anywhere that a man or woman is trying to live without God. It doesn't have to be in New Orleans or in New York or in Chicago or Memphis, or some other far away place. It can be right where you are living now. And there in that far country, where you leave God out, you may see sin's awful ruin. The ruin of sin! Lives wrecked by sin! Homes destroyed by sin! Character blasted by sin! Men trifle with sin and reap sin's ruin. Sin can destroy everything men have. Through sin they may lose their character, lose their jobs, lose their families, lose everything. Sin is a blight, a curse to this world! Sin ruins lives! Here was a young man who went out into the far country. There he got into the wrong way of living, with the wrong crowd, and he went down, down, down, until all that he had was gone. His life was ruined.

Years ago, when I was pastor in Gulfport, Mississippi, one morning about five o'clock my telephone rang and a drunken voice said, "I wish you would come to see me. I gotta talk to you." I was finally able to find out that the speaker was a man in the Markham Hotel. The Markham was the largest hotel in Gulfport. After a little while, I went down to the hotel. I told the desk clerk about the call and explained why I had come. The bellboy took me up the elevator to the room. When we came to the room, there were bottles outside the

door, and the stench of liquor was coming through the transom. The bellboy opened the door and I went in. There were all the signs of the wreck and ruin that liquor and drunkenness could bring to an individual. A man was lying on the bed. His face was not shaved. His hair was not combed, and he was dirty. There was the filth of a long drunk upon him. He was trying to sober up, and I just stood and looked at him. He then began to tell me a little bit about himself. I found that he had, at one time, been named on all-Southwest conference football team, when he played for Baylor University. I found that he lived in one of the largest cities in Louisiana; that he had a wife and two little children; that he had a very fine job, but he had begun to trifle with sin. He had begun to drink socially and to associate with the wrong crowd. The result had been that he had lost his own strength of character; he had lost his home, because his wife had left him and taken the children; he had lost his job and his courage, and now he had lost his hope. Here he was in this hotel room, and as finally he got his story out, he said to me, "Preacher, you have got to help me." And he said, "If you don't help me, I am going to walk out into the Gulf of Mexico, and I am going to keep walking. Please, help me!" Well, I tried to talk to him. I told him, "I can't help you. I do not have anything to help you with except a message, but I do have a message. I have a Friend who can help you. He can change your life. He can change everything. And that Friend is the Lord Jesus Christ." I told him of the saving power of our Lord. I shall never forget that scene, even though I have had other experiences similar to it.

I know another man who held a wonderful job with the Lincoln Motor Company. He was head of their sales department for seven states. And yet, I saw him many times as just a staggering drunkard on the street. He had lost his family. He had lost his job. He had lost everything.

The ruin of sin! Oh, don't trifle with sin. Don't play with sin. Don't believe that you can somehow get by and gamble with sin and not lose. It isn't so. Sin is a destroyer. Sin brings wreckage and ruin.

Dr. Ellis A. Fuller tells in one of his sermons of an experience which happened when he was pastor in Atlanta. One day someone called him and said, "Dr. Fuller, there is a woman and her husband who need you right now in a certain apartment in a certain section of this city. Will you go to them?" He called his wife and they got in the car and drove down to this apartment building. He said that it was the finest apartment building in the city. A person had to be wealthy to live in it. Dr. and Mrs. Fuller went up the elevator and to the door of the apartment. They rang the bell, and in a moment a man came. They told him who they were and he invited them in. They walked into the luxurious and beautifully appointed apartment. There was a rather pale looking woman sitting in a chair in a dressing gown, and this man was her husband. Dr. and Mrs. Fuller said that they sat and talked to the man and his wife, who were genteel and friendly and courteous to the visitors. After a short visit, Dr. and Mrs. Fuller left, without ever perceiving what the problem was. He said to his wife as they went away, "There's some mistake somewhere. Surely the person that said, 'Here's a family

that needs you,' didn't know what he was talking about. There must have been some mistake." However, the next morning there was a knock at the door of the preacher's study, and the secretary brought in the woman who had been in the chair the previous afternoon. She said to him, "Oh, man of God, why did you knock on our door yesterday afternoon at the moment you did? How did you know to come to us when you did? You saw that I was in a dressing gown and had my hands in my pockets. I had a vial of poison in my hand and my husband had been sitting there guarding me to keep me from taking it. Man of God, just at that moment you knocked at the door. I don't know why you came." Dr. Fuller answered, "But why were you doing it?" She told him a story. She had been playing with sin, had been unfaithful to her husband, and had been wrecking her own life. She told of the sorrow and tragedy and bitterness of it all, because of what sin had done. Then she said, "Oh, man of God, I have come to you. Is there any hope for one like me? Can God do something for one like me? Can God receive a sinner who has lived in sin like I have? Can God save our home and save me?" Dr. Fuller was able to tell her the story of the love of God for sinners and redemption from the degradation of sin.

III. THE REMEDY FOR SIN

Yes, this story tells us something we all know -- the ruin of sin. It also tells us something else. It tells us the remedy for sin. What is that remedy? What can we offer to men and women and young people of this day when they are out in the world of sin? What is

the answer? There is only one answer. The denial of guilt of sin is not the answer. Many people say, "Oh, I'm not bad, and I have not gone deep in things of sin. I'm not one of those persons who needs salvation." Denying sin is not the answer. Condoning sin is not the answer. A person says, "Well, I'm just going to take it one world at a time. When I get to the next one I will see how we get along there." I'm sorry to say, but you cannot take it that way. If you are going to be ready for the next world, you must get ready in this world, and if you are going to be ready for the next world and prepared to meet God, the sin question has to be settled in this world. You can't love sin and love God. You can't hold on to sin and go in your sinful ways and then expect God just to say, "It's all right." No, that isn't the answer. Condoning sin and loving sin and going on in it is not the answer for sin. Neither is an effort to cover up sin by saying, "Well, I'm going to do some good things to cover up the bad things. I have walked in sin a long time, but I am going to start doing good works. I am going to be good to people. I am going to reform and change my way and do a lot of fine things for people." That isn't the answer to sin.

There is only one answer to sin. Listen to what Jesus said in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Luke, verse three, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," and in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts, the thirtieth verse, we read, "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Jesus said in the first chapter of Mark, the fifteenth verse, "Repent ye and believe the gospel." It is not just believing the historical fact about Jesus that

saves you. Belief in the heart is certainly the essential thing, but there's something else. You can't trust Christ as Saviour, nor can you believe in Him as Saviour, as long as you are holding on to sin. The one answer to sin is to repent of it, to ask God to forgive you for it, and turn from it. What does repentance mean? It means, sin perceived: that is, I see it, I realize what it is, and I realize what it is doing to me. Sin abhorred: that means I don't want to go the way of sin anymore. I don't want to live that kind of life anymore. Sin abandoned: it is a change of mind that brings a change of life. The little Vacation Bible School girl's definition of repentance, "being sorry enough for your sins to quite them," is certainly a true picture. You see sin as God sees it, and you ask God to forgive your sins, and you turn from your sins. Listen, that is the only answer to sin. There is no white-washing in that. God has to cleanse you by His own grace and power. The blood of Christ cleanseth us when we repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus. That is the answer.

IV. THE RECEPTION OF THE SINNER

I hasten to the central truth -- the reception of the sinner. If a sinner comes to God, will God receive him? If a man who has gone down into the depths of sin comes to God, will God receive him? If a man who is full of pride comes to God, will God receive him? If a man who has sold his soul for the things of this world comes to God, will God receive him? I am glad to say, yes, if he comes repenting of sin and believing in Jesus. Look at the story. The Word tells us here that this man went down so deep in sin that

he came to the hog pen. Literally he was down in the hog pen, but then the Bible says, "He came to himself." Thank God when a man comes to himself! I have known people to whom I wished I could say something, or do something, to make them come to themselves, to make them see where they were going, and what they were doing, to see what sin was doing to them. This man came to himself. He said, "In my father's house, the hired servants have bread and to spare, while here I am perishing with hunger." He said, "I know what I will do. I will arise and go to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Just make me one of thy hired servants." And, listen, he didn't just say it and do nothing. He didn't just stand back and say, "I know that's what I ought to do." He climbed over the fence of that pig pen and started for home. Thank God, when a person sees himself as a sinner, realizes his need of Christ, and "climbs over the fence and starts for home." That is repentance.

This prodigal boy started, and the twentieth verse says, "And he arose and came to his father, and when he was yet a great way off his father saw him." This old father was watching. He was waiting. He was looking. He was longing. And there is not a sinner toward whom the Lord God is not looking, and longing, and wishing that he would come. God doesn't force anybody to be saved. God doesn't make you repent of sin. He waits with love and mercy to forgive you. This old father was watching, and when the son was a great way off, we read that he ran to meet him. When you start toward God, you do not have to worry

about whether He will receive you. He will be right there to meet you.

This old father received his son and gave him five gifts. Those five gifts picture for us the reception that was given the prodigal. Moreover, they picture what God does for the sinner. We read first "that he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." I think that kiss is the kiss of forgiveness. Oh, you've sinned, you've gone far away, but here is a kiss, a kiss of forgiveness. Then the son said, "I have sinned, sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He didn't even get to finish it. The old father just stopped him in the middle of his cry. He said to the servant, "Bring the best robe and put it on him." When I came to God as a sinner, He gave me the robe of righteousness, not mine, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They stripped the old filth and the old dirt and the unclean things away and they put the robe upon him. God does that with the sinner. But you say, "I'm not worthy to be saved. There are many things in my life that make me unworthy to be saved." Certainly you are not worthy, nobody has ever said you were. You may be the chief of sinners, but God can cleanse you by His cleansing power. He can cleanse you in the blood of the Lamb and provide you the robe of righteousness.

The father said, "Put a ring on his hand." That is a sign of sonship. He is in the family. When you come to Christ as Saviour, God makes you His own son. Then he said, "Put shoes on his feet." That means service. He is to be part of the family. He is to help carry on the work that is to be done, the tasks of the father's

household. When you come to God as a sinner, He gives you a place of service in His work. You have the privilege of being in His church. You have the privilege of helping to carry His message to a lost world.

Then the father said, "Kill the fatted calf. We are going to have a feast. he was dead, but but he is alive." And God does provide the riches of His grace. We sing the old song, "Feasting on the riches of His grace," and He gives us so many good things and does so many wonderful things for us that we cannot list them all. This salvation which God gives the sinner is the most wonderful thing in the world.

Listen! God does love sinners! That is the word that is here. Even as a father would receive a prodigal, so God will receive any sinner in this world who will come to Him. I have been reading the stories of some of the people who were saved in the Billy Graham revival in New York City. I read of a young business man who had grown up in a home in the slum area of New York City. He had not been able to finish his education, but he had gone into insurance, had found a good job, and had received a large income. Because he was prosperous, he began to run with a fast crowd and join in evil activities. He began to drink and to curse. He became so profane that he lost two or three jobs just because of profanity. He went down morally until he said, "I had no respect for myself and no one else had any respect for me." He added, "I came to the place where I felt like I was forgotten, I was abandoned. Nobody cared. And then I began to hear about Billy Graham, and one night I became so concerned about it that I said, 'I will have to go and hear him.' "

He said, "I got in a taxi and said to the taxi driver, 'I have to hear Billy Graham. If I don't, I don't know what I am going to do.' " The taxi driver said, "Buddy, I'll pray for you because I've been to hear him, too, and I know what he has done for me and he can do it for you, too." This man said that he went into the Garden that night and sat as one lone person in that vast audience, but Billy Graham seemed to be preaching right to him, because the Spirit of God was using the message. Billy described this man's condition and his need, but said, "God loves you and God has provided salvation for you, because Christ went to the cross and died for your sins, so that God can forgive your sins and save your soul." And he said, "If you will come to God just like you are, God will receive you tonight." This man said, "It seemed too good to be true. I sat there as the message was delivered, saying to myself, 'Oh, if I could have this help, if I could have this answer.' " When the invitation began, he walked down that aisle. He added, "As I walked, something happened in my heart. When I went into the inquiry room, already I had trusted Christ." He tells that God took the profanity from his lips and the love of liquor out of his body, and today he is a living witness for Christ. Just a prodigal who came home to God, and God received him.

God wants to receive sinners. Every day He wants to receive them. Every man, woman, boy and girl in this world, who in his heart realizes, "I'm not a Christian. I have not been saved. I have not trusted Christ," can know that God is calling him. He is saying to him, "Seek ye the Lord while He may

be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

CHAPTER FIVE

A GREAT BIRTH PREPARES FOR IT

John 3:1-18

The theme of Southern Baptist simultaneous revivals a few years ago was, "New Life for You." Life comes from birth. New life comes from new birth, so as we proclaim to men of the world that God offers "new life for you, we are meaning that through the new birth, through the experience of regeneration, God has provided a way of our lives being made over, of our receiving new life from God. Let us consider that theme, "New Life for You," as we study together the wonderful experience of the new birth. The scripture is the third chapter of the Gospel of John, the chapter which tells of the coming of Nicodemus to talk to Jesus.

This is a strange experience. It is the case of a leading citizen of the community coming to talk to a peasant preacher. Today, we magnify and glorify the Lord, Jesus Christ, because we know who He is. But in those days, in the beginning of His ministry, He was not known, He was not honored. Men did not accept Him as the Son of God. Here was a leader of the Sanhedrin, one of the finest citizens of the community, coming to talk to a preacher who had come with a strange message, with a new doctrine, and with a new truth. Nicodemus met Jesus. In the opening chapters of the book of John, we see a number of sinners meeting the Saviour. Here we have an important sinner meeting Jesus. In the fourth chapter we have

the woman at the well, an immoral sinner meeting Jesus. In the fifth chapter we have the man who was helpless at the pool, an impotent man meeting Jesus. All of them had the same needs. Each one needed to be born again.

Nicodemus had many worthy possessions. He had position, power, prominence, religion and character, but there was one thing missing. He did not have salvation. He had heard of Jesus. He had known of His preaching. He had known of His works, and because of the interest that was down in his own heart, he could not stay away from this itinerant preacher who was coming with a new message. We have the story of it here.

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night." I know that there are those who say that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he was afraid to come at other times. That may have been true. I am not sure. It might have been that he came because it was the only time he could be alone with Jesus, and he wanted to have a heart to heart talk with Him. In the daytime, the crowds were pressing about Jesus, and it was impossible to be with Him alone. Whatever the reason may have been, this ruler, this leader of the Jews, came to Jesus and said to Him, "Rabbi (or teacher), we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." He was not understanding what was happening. He was impressed by Jesus' works. He was anxious to know what it meant. He felt in his heart that Jesus surely was a man come from God, so he came to interview Him.

I. THE MUST OF THE NEW BIRTH

Jesus did not answer Nicodemus by discussing whether He had come from God or not. He does not talk to him about Himself. Jesus answers in a strange way and says, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said unto Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said unto him, "How can these things be?" Jesus said unto him, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God

sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

Jesus said to this man, this religious man, this moral man, this man of high character, this man of integrity, this man of sincerity, this man who was seeking to know God's way, "Nicodemus immediately was saying, "Well, how can this be? How can this be?" Perhaps he was saying in his own heart, "Oh, that would be wonderful. If a man could be born again! If we could just go back and start all over, how different our lives would be!" I am sure that many of us would say that, too. We would say, "If I could just go back and start my life again. If I could just be young again, how many things would be different." Somebody wrote the words,

"I wish there were some wonderful
place
Called the land of beginning again;
Where all our mistakes and all our
heartaches,
And all our selfish grief,
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat
at the door,
And never put on again."

Oh, if we could!

"Nicodemus, ye must be born again, You must have a new birth," Nicodemus did not understand this, but it was Christ's word to him -- a necessity. This is a strange word to some people today. They think that somehow if they have religion, if they have gone to church, or if they have grown up in a Christian home, that is all that's necessary. But Jesus was saying to a religious leader, "Ye must be born again." Why did Jesus say this to this man? He was a religious man. He was a praying man. He was a man who was active in the life of the religion of the day, and yet Jesus went right to the needs of his heart and said, "Ye must be born again." Why? I think we can give two reasons from God's Word why a new birth is necessary -- why it is necessary for every man and woman and boy and girl in this world to be born again or to be saved. Why?

First of all, man's nature demands it. Our natures demand a new birth. Our natures are sinful natures. We read in God's Word that "we are all by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Eph. 2:3) By nature, a child of wrath -- under the wrath of God. We read in the third chapter of the book of Romans: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no not one." "There is none that doeth good. There is none that seeketh after God." "All come short of the glory of God." All are sinners, and because we are sinners, sinners in our very nature, we need a new birth, that our nature may be changed and those sins be blotted out. Our nature demands that we have a new birth.

And, then, God's nature demands it. If we are to stand before God who is holy and just and righteous, then we must have a nature like unto His. We are not fit to stand before God in our human nature, which is sinful, and fallen. Our nature demands a change, and God's nature demands it. If we are to be ready to stand before God, if we are to be acceptable unto Him, if we are to have fellowship with Him, we must be changed.

We can use a very ordinary illustration. There are people who say, "Well, I am as good as the church member. I am as good as the Christian." There are some who say, "Well, I am as good as your people who go to church. I live just as good a life. I pay my debts the same way they do. I try to treat my neighbors right, just as they do. I try to be honest and upright." But wait a minute! Suppose such a man wants to be the president of the United States. He lives next door to you, but he was not born in this country, nor born a citizen of the United States. He is a citizen of a foreign land, but he is over here now, and he lives there next to you. You have pieces of property the same size. You pay the same amount of taxes. You live your lives in a very similar way. You do things together, but one of you might conceivably be president of the United States, while the other could never be. Now, what's the difference? Both are good men, both have fine characters, both are honest, both support the government, and both pay taxes. One thing is wrong. One was born a citizen of the United States and the other was not, and our constitution says that only those who have been born citizens of this nation can be president, if elected.

Here is the same picture. I want to be a citizen in God's kingdom. I want to go to heaven when I die and be with the Lord and have the riches of His grace. I am just as good as my neighbor who has been saved. I try to do things in the same way he does. We are respected and honored in the same way, but there is one difference. One of us has been born again and the other has not. One will go to heaven and the other will go to hell. "Ye must be born again." Our nature demands it and God's nature demands it, and God's Word reveals that God requires it. Jesus said, "Nicodemus, ye must be born again."

II. THE MEANING OF THE NEW BIRTH

Nicodemus was perplexed. "How can this be? Can I go back into my mother's womb and come forth as a child again? Why, no I couldn't do that. How can this thing be?" Jesus said to him, "The wind bloweth where it listeth. You do not know where it came from, you do not know where it is going, but you know there's a wind. It is a mystery." He added, "...so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The Spirit of God comes into the heart and does His work. Human experience, perhaps, cannot explain it, but Jesus said it's something that will happen and something you must have if you are to be saved.

What is this? What is Jesus saying to Nicodemus? "Ye must be born again." He said, "Ye must be born of water and of the Spirit. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." What does it mean? What is the new birth? Let me say, first of all, what it is not. The new birth is not just being

religious. I have known people who have said, "Well, I'm religious. I think that is all that it takes." It isn't just being religious. It isn't just being civilized. Some people think because we live in a land that is called Christian America, that means that we are Christians. That isn't what God's Word says. It isn't education and culture. It isn't good morals. It isn't accepting Jesus as a teacher. It isn't accepting Jesus as a great man. It isn't keeping the ordinances. It isn't doing the best you can. It isn't reform or reformation. It isn't turning over a new leaf and saying, "I am going to live a different kind of life." It isn't moral character. It isn't holding out faithful. It isn't confirmation. It isn't reformation. It isn't joining the church. You could join a church one hundred times, and you could be baptized a hundred times, but if you do not have a spiritual experience in your heart you have not been born again, and you are not saved.

What, then, is the new birth? Jesus said here, to this man, that there were two things necessary. He said, "born of water and of the Spirit." What did He mean? In order to understand what He means, I think we have to understand that Jesus was talking to a Jew. Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, should have understood exactly what Jesus was saying -- "born of water and of the spirit." In the book of Numbers there was given a picture of the cleansing of a sinner. In one of the ceremonials in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Numbers, there was included the ordinance of the red heifer. A red heifer was slain and burned, and the ashes of that heifer were put into water, and we read in the seventeenth verse that the sprinkling of this water was

for the cleansing of the people. In the book of Ezekiel, the Lord said that He would put a new nature in us. He would cleanse and renew. Of what was that water a type? Cleansing. What was the work of the Spirit, then, along with it? The Spirit's work of renewing. "Nicodemus, if a man is to be born again, he must be cleansed from his old sins and he must be renewed by the Spirit." Evidently, this referred to the Old Testament water of ceremonial cleansing. Now, that is not baptism. The water of the ceremonial cleansing was special water from the red heifer, which is a type of the blood of Jesus Christ. How do I know that it is a type of the blood of Jesus Christ? In the book of Hebrews, the ninth chapter, verses 11 to 13, we read, "But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" There must be the cleansing, Nicodemus, your old nature, your old sinful life must be cleansed. Then, there must be the renewing. We read in Titus 3:5 these words, concerning this experience: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration (that's the cleansing) and the re-

newing of the Holy Ghost." There is God's Spirit, making you a new creature, cleansing and renewing. We read in the book of Revelation, the first chapter, the fifth verse: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." No, this washing is not baptism. The outward washing of water or the use of water could not cleanse this nature, but it is the blood of Jesus that washes away our sins, and it was pictured in the Old Testament in the typical cleansing by the sprinkling of the ashes of this heifer. "Nicodemus, you must be born again. You must have a cleansing of your nature, you must be made a new creature."

Dr. B. H. Carroll said concerning this passage, "Cleansing and renewing. In the new birth there are at least two distinct ideas. First, cleansing. Second, renewing. If you took hold of the idea of cleansing and left out the idea of renewing, the cleansing would not do any good. The sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mire because she is a sow. If you do not change her nature then you do no good to cleanse her. But if you change the nature and do not cleanse, then you have left purity, imprisoned in filth. So, there are two ideas always in the new birth. First, cleansing. Second, renewing."

In the new birth, the Word of God is preached. We read concerning that in I Peter 1:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." We read in James 1:18, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures," and in Ephesians 5:25, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it;

that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." The Word of God is preached and you hear the message, and then you repent and believe. The Lord says that there are two things that everyone of us must do. We must repent. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," Jesus said in Luke 13:3; and we read in Acts, the seventeenth chapter, "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent," and Jesus said in Mark, the first chapter, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." So the first thing we must do is repent.

Then, there must be belief, faith, trust. This means to believe in the Lord Jesus, to trust Him, the same way that you would trust in any other area. I trust a doctor by putting myself in his hands. He takes the knife and cuts on me. I don't help him. I just trust myself to him. So, I commit myself to the Lord Jesus, and He does it all. My part is to repent and believe, and then God saves or gives the new birth. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the man or the woman or the boy or the girl who repents of sin and believes in the Lord Jesus. Dr. E. Y. Mullins said, "It is an inward, instantaneous spiritual change, wrought in the human soul by the power and grace of God." It is God's part in our salvation. Our part is to repent and believe; to trust Christ as Saviour, and then the Spirit of God comes in and does His work. It is an instantaneous change. It is a complete change. A man is made a new creature when he trusts Christ as Saviour, because the Spirit of God gives him a new birth in that very moment. That is what the new birth is. It is God's work in your heart, cleansing you of the old sins and renewing you and making you a new creature of Christ.

III. THE MEANS OF THE NEW BIRTH

Nicodemus said, "How can this be?" Jesus said, "Nicodemus, do you remember that back in the wilderness the serpents were biting the people, and that God gave the commandment to Moses to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole so that people who were dying could look at that serpent of brass and live. That was the word, 'Look and Live.'" They didn't have to touch the serpent. They didn't have to do something to merit healing. They just looked and lived. Jesus said, "Even as Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." How can God forgive my sins, cleanse me from sin, take me as a sinner and make me a child of God? It is because my sin debt was paid by Jesus on Calvary. As Billy Graham once said, "God can't just go around and forgive everybody his sins, just because he would like to be good to him. Sin is such a serious thing that the penalty of sin must be paid, but when Christ died on the cross, He was dying to pay the penalty for sin, because Christ did die for sin, and because our sins were covered there, then, when we repent and believe, God can forgive us, and God does forgive us, and God does cleanse us from sin and does make us new creatures in Christ." Cleansed through the work of the Spirit in our hearts. Jesus continues the discussion, making it clear that a man has to trust, has to believe, has to accept, in order to be saved, in order to have this new birth.

Dr. Ellis Fuller, who long was pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, said that while he

was in that city, one day the telephone rang and a lady who was the dean of women down in a great college in Georgia said to him, "Dr. Fuller, can you get on the train and come down here. I need your help, and I wonder if you could come. I need to talk to you and I can't come there. Will you come here?" She was a friend that he had known for a long time, so he got on the train and went down to her city. When he got there, she said, "I am in such a condition that I don't know what I'm going to do. I am the dean of women here and I have responsibility for the chapel services, but I have lost all of my faith. I don't believe anything, and when I stand up and use the word 'Christ' and speak to these young women about being Christians, I feel such a hypocrite, that I feel I must resign rather than do it any longer. I just can't go on with it. It is all hypocrisy. It doesn't mean anything to me, and I wonder if you can help me." He said to her, "Let me ask you a question. Have you been born again?" She said, "I don't know what you are talking about." He said, "I mean, have you been saved? Have you been born again?" "Why," she said, "I have never heard of that." She said, "I have grown up in the church. I was taken in when I was a baby and I have always gone to church, but I don't know what you are talking about." He began to tell her that each one of us as an individual must have a personal experience with God in his own heart, and that going to church, or going to Sunday School, or reading the Bible doesn't save. He made clear that we each must trust Christ in his own heart. He gave her this message that Jesus gave to Nicodemus. They were persons of similar character and training, education and culture,

this woman and Nicodemus, and Dr. Fuller showed her how she had to come to Christ, just as a little child, repenting of sin and trusting Christ as her Saviour. He said, "When you do that, the Lord will give you the new birth and you will be saved, and all of these problems will be solved."

Dr. Fuller tells that the woman was saved, and her whole life was changed. She became a radiant Christian, a glorious witness for Christ, and her witness changed the lives of many young women and others on the campus where she served.

There was new life for Nicodemus and for this woman. God also wants to give it to you. Will you accept it now?

CHAPTER SIX

A GREAT WORD PICTURES IT

Titus 3:5

The new life in Christ is described in many ways in the New Testament. Various words are used to express its meaning, and no one word could possibly tell all about it. However, the one word which most nearly pictures its fullness is the word "saved". This well may be the most meaningful word in the whole Bible. Let us carefully consider it in order that we may understand what the great life God offers to men really is.

A good text to use for this study is Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Our emphasis will be on the three words, "He saved us."

There are many wonderful words in the Bible, but can there be any word that has a broader and deeper meaning than the word "saved" and its related word, "salvation"? As we read through the Bible we find that word used many, many times.

Throughout the Old Testament there is the promise of salvation, of being saved, and of one who would come to save. As we open the New Testament we find this word is there from the

opening chapter. In Matthew 1:21, the messenger from God, the angel, said to Joseph "thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall SAVE his people from their sins."

We read in Luke 19:10, "The Son of man is come to seek and to SAVE that which was lost." We read in John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be SAVED." And we read in the fourth chapter of Acts and the twelfth verse that . . . "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be SAVED."

In Acts 16:30-31, we have the question, "What must I do to be SAVED?" and the answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be SAVED." We read in Romans 10:1 Paul's prayer . . . "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be SAVED." We read in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye SAVED through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." in I Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to SAVE sinners; of whom I am chief."

Over and over and over is this wonderful truth revealed to us, that God has provided salvation, that Christ came to save sinners. In this series of messages we clearly have seen that. We have learned that Christ is the answer as He comes to save us from our sins. We have found that being saved is the most

important thing in the world and that it is time to be saved now. We have seen sin and the need for salvation.

The Bible clearly reveals how that Christ died for our sins in order that He might save us. Now we ask the question: "What does this word mean?" What are we talking about when we say, "be saved"? What happens to an individual when he is saved? When a boy or girl trusts Christ, or when a man or woman trusts Christ, what happens? In that experience of salvation which you had . . . maybe it was in a revival meeting somewhere, maybe it was in a regular worship service, maybe it was in a Sunday School class, maybe you were by yourself. . . what happened to you? People have been saved in the bedrooms of their homes as they knelt by the side of their beds. Men have been saved on battlefields. They have been saved in many, many different places. The question we are asking is: "What did it mean?" What happened to them? Does anything happen when you are saved?

In the new birth God does His work in the heart of an individual when that person repents and believes. I well remember the night when I was saved. I was an Intermediate boy. For a long time I had realized that I needed to be saved. Every time I heard a sermon I felt that it was directed to me, and I came to be afraid to go to sleep at night because I knew that I was lost and that if I died without having Christ as my Saviour, I would go to hell. It was during a revival meeting in the Second Baptist Church in West Frankfort, Illinois. The building is gone now. An attractive new building is there, but it was an old frame building when I attended as

a boy. That night as the preacher gave the invitation my Sunday School teacher slipped over and put his arm around me and said, "Joe, don't you think you ought to give your heart to Christ tonight?" I had been thinking about it. That was about all I had been thinking about, and when he spoke to me, my heart melted, and I said, "Yes," and I came; and that night the Lord saved me.

Now what did the Lord do for me that night? What has He done for others who are saved? Let us look at the Word of God. I am not naming the things God has done in the order of importance nor in the order they are received. I think most of these things happen, in the very moment that you are saved, and others will follow soon after as a result of the salvation experience.

I. SIN QUESTION SETTLED

The first thing that I would say is that his sins are forgiven. The reason we need to be saved is because we are sinners. We have walked in sin, we have lived in sin, and we are guilty of sin. Somebody says, "Well, I don't think most persons are so bad." Let us consider. How many sins would you estimate we commit each day? I do not know. Somebody discussed it and said "maybe ten a day." Ten things a day I have done that God did not want me to do. All right, that means many, many sins. That means 3,650 a year. Suppose you have lived for ten years from the age of accountability. That means many, many thousands of things against you. Now what is to happen to all of that sin when we are saved? We read the word of Revelation 1:5, "To him

who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." In his own blood our sins are forgiven.

Let's look at the Word of God in Acts 13:38-39. We hear these words . . . "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things. . . ." We read in Acts 10:45, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Isaiah 44:22 says, "God hath blotted out our transgressions as a thick cloud. . ." just as if they were written across the sky and God brings a cloud and covers them all and they are blotted out. We read in Isaiah 38:17 . . . "he has cast my sins behind his back." God has put them behind him so He does not see them any more. In Psalm 103:12 it is said. . . "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath God removed our sins from us". We read in Hebrews 10:17 some wonderful words. They are startling as we read them. They tell us that God forgets something. You reply, "God forgets something?" Well, He says He does, in Hebrews 10:17: "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." So here is all of our sin forgiven. Oh, how many men have found a peace and a joy surge in their souls as they realize God has forgiven it all. . . it is all blotted out.

They tell a story that in my home state of Illinois there was a man who had committed a minor crime in Chicago, and had been sent down to the state penitentiary at Joliet. Later he was saved and wanted to get his record removed from the penitentiary files. He was ashamed of the

criminal act he had committed, and could not be satisfied that the state had his fingerprints and photograph and the record of his crime and punishment. He said, "If I could just get those removed, how happy I would be." He made the effort but officials refused to do anything about it. They said, "We have known a lot of fellows who would like to have their records out of here." And they refused to remove them. Then one day this man was in the hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, and at a testimony meeting told the story of how God had saved him and how he had longed to get his name off the books of the Illinois courts because he wanted the old life of crime blotted out. He did not know it, but the Governor of Illinois was in the audience that night, and at the close of the service the Governor said to him: "Your story interests me. When I go back home, I am going to see what I can do."

In a few days this man received a package. In it were the photographs and the fingerprint cards and all the other criminal records, and with them was a letter from the Governor of Illinois, which said: "The State of Illinois has nothing against you any more. It is as if you had never committed the crime." You can imagine the joy in this man's heart, but let me tell you something more wonderful. All the sins of our lives, all the things that we have done, all the disobediences to God, all the broken laws of God, are blotted out in the blood of Jesus Christ in the very moment we trust Christ as Saviour. If that was all there were to salvation, that would make it wonderfully worthwhile. But that is just a part of it. Indeed, on this sin question there is something even more wonderful. It is so amazing that many men have refused to believe

it when they read it in the Bible.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Romans in the seventh and eighth verses we have this amazing statement, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." Here Paul speaks about iniquities forgiven and sins covered. Listen to the next verse: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." What does that word "impute" mean? It means "charge." Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not charge sin. From the day you were saved, God has never again charged a sin against you. If he had, then you would have to die and go to hell for those sins. But listen, your sins are charged to Jesus. Now, do not assume something I have not said. I did not say that God would not hold you, as a Christian, responsible for the sins you commit. He does hold you accountable, but sin is not charged against you so far as the death penalty is concerned. After you are saved, God deals with you as his child. When you disobey Him He administers the chastening rod, but He does not send anyone to hell who has been saved. No saved person ever again will be lost, because his sins are charged to Jesus.

When Charles Wesley read this great verse, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not charge sin," he wrote the song, "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise . . ." This is one of the texts which makes clear that our salvation is eternal. When you are saved, you are saved forever because the sin question is settled forever.

A man said to me one time, "If I believed what you just preached, I would go out and have my fill of sin." I answered, "Do you mean to say

that the only reason you don't go out and live in evil and in a sinful way is because you are afraid God will send you to hell if you do?" He said, "That is right. But if I just knew that He wouldn't send me to hell I would go out and do a lot of things." I said, "My dear friend, you had better get on your knees and ask God to save you." When a man is saved he does not want to go out and live like the devil. His feet will sometimes slip, and he may do things he should not. He will find the flesh is weak and the devil will try to trap him, but in his heart he can never be happy in sin.

I do not believe that any Christian can ever be happy in sin. Once I talked to a backslidden man and said to him, "Are you happy outside the church, and are you happy not doing God's work, and not going to church like you used to?" He said, "No, of course not." Of course not! A Christian can't be happy when he is living outside the will of God. Nevertheless, in this passage, God says the sin question was settled, as far as eternal hell and eternal salvation is concerned, the moment we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. PEACE WITH GOD

We read in Romans 5 that at that moment when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we stand justified before God and have peace with God. In Romans 5:1 we read, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Somebody said, "Well, I am not at war with God. I don't have anything against God." That may be true, but God had something against you. But when you come to Christ then you stand justified as if you had

never sinned and you have peace with God. What a joy to know that God is one who loves me, keeps me, watches over me, and guides me. We have peace with God the very moment we trust Christ as Saviour.

III. A CHILD OF GOD

Let us see a third thing. We read in the Word of God that the very moment a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he becomes a child of God. When do you become a child of God? Not at some time in the future. Not after the judgment. What does the Bible say?

We read in John 1:12, "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name." There is a doctrine in the world that teaches the universal fatherhood of God. That is a false teaching when we think of spiritual relationship. There is nothing of that in God's word. All people are the creation of God, but God is the spiritual father only of those who believe. Jesus said to some of the religious leaders of his day, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father will you do." In I John 3:10 we read of the two groups of people -- the children of God and the children of the devil. How does a person become a child of God? Here are the words in John 1:12 . . . "as many as received him." Ah, as many as receive Him. Jesus came and offered Himself as Saviour and some received Him, and as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name. In Galatians 3:26 we read, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." We read in I John 3:1, "Behold, what

manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." I am a child of the King, hallelujah; I am a child of the King" because He has saved me and I am His.

I have a preacher friend who grew up in an orphanage in another state. About the time he was nine or ten years of age he was adopted by a wealthy family. He was their only son, for they had no other children, and thus was their sole heir. All that they had was his. All that they had was given to him. He was their son. We are the children of God by adoption, yes. We are also the children of God by a birth. We are His. We can sing that song and say, "Yes, I am a child of God. . ." and that happens the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus.

IV. A NEW HEART AND A NEW NATURE

Something else happens the very moment you believe in the Lord and the Spirit of God does His regenerating work in your heart. You have a new heart and a new nature. We read in II Corinthians 5:17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And we read in II Peter, the first chapter, verse four, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature . . ." God's nature is given to me, I become a child of God, and I am a new creature in Christ.

I was in a revival meeting in another state some time ago. There was a man in the community who had been a liquor dealer for several

years, and before that had been a bootlegger. His wife was a member of the church. She had requested prayer for him in one of our services, and when he learned of it, he cursed her, the church, the preachers, and everybody who was in any way trying to interfere with his life and business. We kept on praying for him. One morning the Lord laid upon my heart and that of the pastor that we ought to go down there and talk to him. We found that the Spirit of God had been working on his heart, as well as ours, for that morning when he had gone to his store, for some reason, the Spirit of God would not let him put his key in the door. We went to the store and he was not there. We went to his house, and he said, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I got up to the store this morning and, for some reason, my hands seemed to be held, as if by a vise, so I could not put the key in the door." He added, "I didn't sleep much last night. I don't know what's wrong with me." We told him we knew what was wrong with him -- that the spirit of God was making him see what a sinner he was and how he needed to be saved. We began to read God's Word and to talk to him about being saved. After quite a long time, maybe an hour or more, we said, "Now we want to pray. Won't you get down on your knees here with us and pray?" I said, "We are going to pray and then we are going to wait on you to pray." He said, "I don't know how to pray." I said, "Well, you can tell God about your sins. You can ask God to forgive you," and then we prayed. For quite a while he didn't say anything and then it seemed that the tide just broke, and he cried unto God for mercy, and in a few moments he got up and put his arm around me and

said, "I wouldn't sell another drop of liquor for one thousand dollars." Now, what had happened? He was a new creature in Christ Jesus. I saw him three or four years ago. I said, "Do you remember the first thing you said after you were saved?" He said, "Preacher, I do remember it, and I have never sold another drop from that day to this."

How marvelous to see what the Lord can do in the hearts of men! I have seen drunkards made sober; I have seen liars made truthful; I have seen thieves made honest; I have seen profane men given clean lips and clean hearts. How great is the work God can do when He comes into the heart of a man! It happens the moment you believe. You are not perfect at that time, but sanctification begins then. However, as far as your spiritual nature is concerned, you are a new creature in Christ the moment you trust Christ as Saviour.

V. EVERLASTING LIFE

There is something else. The very moment you trust Christ as Saviour you receive everlasting life. There are some people who say, "You cannot know whether you are saved until after the judgment." The judgment is not to decide whether you are saved or not. The decision of whether you are saved is right here on this earth. It is determined by what you do with Jesus. We read in John 3:36: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already" Elsewhere the Word says, "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The decision of your destiny is made here on

this earth. The judgment is the trial to determine the degree of your punishment, and it is going to be worse for some people than for others, but don't let that give you any hope. You live here in a nation where the Gospel has been preached, and if you reject it there is no hope for you. The decision of whether you are going to heaven or hell, whether you are going to have everlasting life, is right here. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he has everlasting life. I have had everlasting life ever since I trusted Christ as Saviour back yonder, many, many years ago.

You don't have to believe me. Listen to God's Word. John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. . . ." It does not say, "hath the promise of everlasting life." It doesn't say, "hath a hope of everlasting life." It does not say, "may some day have everlasting life." It says, "hath," an action that already is completed and is effective now. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." I can say, "Joe Odle hath a watch." That does not mean that I hope to have one some day, that I might get one some day. I have it now. I have everlasting life now and you have everlasting life now, if you are believing in the Lord Jesus. In John 5:24, we read these words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Here are three wonderful possessions -- "hath everlasting life, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." We read in John 6:47 these words -- Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting

life." We read in John 10:27, 28, and 29 these words, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." That is the promise God makes in His Word. Some people say you can have salvation and then lose it, but Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." Listen now, let's go on and finish the sentence -- "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." I trusted Christ as my Saviour, and Jesus says here, "No man is able to pluck them out of my hand." The hand of the Lord is doing the holding. If I were doing the holding, of course I would lose salvation. I couldn't hold on. But, thank God, that isn't true. It is Christ, holding me. Somebody illustrated it by the ark. The Bible says that when Noah and his family went into the ark, God shut the door and they were inside. The storms came, but they were safe because God was doing the keeping. Some people seem to teach that Noah put some big nails on the outside of the ark, and he was holding on to one and his wife was holding on to another, and the children were holding on to another. He was saying, "Now, wife, be sure and hold on. If you can hold on, you will be safe." No, dear friends, that isn't in God's book. God says that He is able to keep those who have committed themselves unto Him. God does the keeping. Here it is. Jesus said, "No man is able to pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." If you have trusted Christ as your Saviour, you

are safe, and safe forever, because the hand of Christ is holding you, the hand of God is holding you, the Holy Spirit has sealed you and He, too, is holding you. Once you have trusted Christ as your Saviour, that moment you have eternal, everlasting life. Your name is written in heaven. You are a child of God. You are on the road to glory because your life is hidden in Christ.

VI. PRIVILEGE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The very moment you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the privilege of being a church member. The church is only for those who have been saved. The most wonderful institution of this world is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would rather be a member of the church than to belong to any other organization in the world because all other things are going to fail. When you unite with a church and you put your talents, your efforts, and all that you have into the church, you are doing things that will last forever. Jesus spoke of that day when He would "present to Himself a glorious church." We read in the second chapter of the Book of Acts these words concerning those who have been saved, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." We read in the 47th verse -- "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Dr. Louie D. Newton is one of the great preachers of the Southern Baptist Convention, and served as president of the Convention for a number of years. He is pastor of one of the churches in Atlanta, Georgia. He tells that when he was a boy, about twelve or thirteen

years of age, he was saved. It was not during a revival meeting, but at another time during the years, and it was unusual for the country church where he attended to have people saved at times other than the annual revival. He came forward one Sunday morning and told the pastor that the Lord had saved him and he wanted to be a member of the church and be baptized, so he could serve the Lord and live for Him. The pastor said, "This young man has come, saying that he has been saved." He questioned him about it, and said, "The Lord has saved you and now you want to be in the church," and Newton answered, "That's what I would like to do." One of the deacons got up and said, "If the Lord has saved this young man, I move that we accept him as a member." Somebody said, "I second the motion," and the church voted him in. Dr. Newton said, "That's the greatest thing that ever happened to me since I was saved. I have the privilege of being a member of a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, where I can use my talents, where I can serve Him, Where I can be with God's people, where I can glorify God in the church through Christ Jesus." You have that privilege, not before you are saved, but after you have trusted Christ as your Saviour.

VII. EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

What else does the Christian have? You have all the exceeding great and precious promises of God, which are given to Christians. We read in II Peter the first chapter, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" -- and how wonderful they are. The promise of God to be with you every day of your life. The

promise of God to provide every need. The promise of God to answer your prayers. The promise of God to guide you, lead you, help you, and bless you. The promise of God to go with you through life, through death, through the judgment and into eternity. How precious are the promises of this Bible. There are so many that you cannot count them all. As you begin, you soon lose track of them, as you see one thing after another that the Lord has prepared for them that love Him, and they are all yours. All the promises God made to His children are yours the moment you trust Christ as Saviour.

VIII. ABUNDANT ENTRANCE

You have an assurance of something else. In II Peter we read concerning an entrance which "shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." When you are saved, the sting of death, the fear of death, is conquered because in Jesus Christ you have victory. You have the Lord in your heart and His blessings in this life, and then His presence is with you as you go out into eternity into that eternal kingdom which He has prepared for those who love Him.

Those are just a few of the things that the Bible tells us are the possession of the person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder God calls it a great salvation. it is the greatest thing that ever has been offered in this world. The forgiveness of sin, peace with God, a new relationship in becoming a child of God, a new nature, everlasting life -- all these other things, and they are yours

as God's free gift.

I shall never forget the night that Eddie Albrook was saved. Eddie was a businessman in Gulfport, Mississippi, where I was pastor. He had lived far from God. He was a successful businessman but he did not have much time for the church. He was doing things that were not pleasing to God. He was living in sin, as so many people are. We were having a great revival in the church. One night I looked out over the congregation and saw Eddie Albrook with Mrs. Albrook and the two daughters. I realized as I saw them that they had been there before during the revival, but that was the first time they sat near the front. Evangelist Eddie Martin was preaching, and the hand of God was there in mighty convicting power. As the invitation was given, I stood in front of the pulpit. People began to come forward to profess faith or unite with the church. In a moment I saw one of the daughters of Eddie Albrook whisper something to her mother, and then she slipped out by her mother and her daddy and walked down the aisle to take my hand. She was eleven or twelve years of age. She said, "Brother Odle, I am taking Jesus as my Saviour. He has saved me and I want to be baptized. I want to be a member of the church." She took a seat at the front. In a moment her younger sister came and took my hand. The tears were flowing down her face as she said, "I take Jesus as my Saviour." I watched Mr. and Mrs. Albrook as the invitation continued. She said something to him, and then slipped by him and came down the aisle and took my hand and said, "Brother Odle, I, too, give my heart to Christ. I know I am a sinner. I know He died for me

and I trust Him as my Saviour right now." There was Eddie standing alone now, but God's Spirit was dealing with him. Tears were on his face, rolling down his cheeks. I was watching him and I was praying for him. In a moment he started. He almost ran as he came down the aisle. He buried his face in my shoulder and was sobbing as he said, "Oh, Brother Odle, I want to be saved. I want God to forgive my sins. I have sinned. I want salvation, too." I began to talk to him, and pray with him, and in a few moments, God had forgiven him, and he was saved. There they were, the four of them together, all saved. When we had the baptismal service, I had all four of them in the baptistry together.

How Eddie loved the Lord! How he tried to serve the Lord in those days and weeks that followed! And then one day, a telegram came to his wife. I think it was perhaps two years after the glorious night. The message came saying that he was in a hospital in another state. He was away on a business trip and had had a heart attack. The telegram said, "You must come to him quickly." Before she could get ready and leave town, another telegram came, saying, "He is gone."

They brought Eddie back to Gulfport. They brought him down that same aisle that he had walked when he trusted Christ as his Saviour. I stood there with that casket before me, and through my tears found joy in my heart, as I could give a testimony of that night, less than two years before, when this man as a sinner, was saved by the grace of God.

It is a great salvation! If you don't think it is a great salvation, just stand where a

preacher stands, when one has gone out into eternity, and realize what it has meant when a man is prepared to go home to God. That is the salvation that God is offering to every sinner. Will you take it? His free gift? It is yours, as you repent and believe! We would say as Paul said to a jailer of old, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

CHAPTER SEVEN

A GREAT POWER PRESERVES IT

John 3:36

What kind of life is this new life in Christ? It is everlasting life, or can man have it for a while and then lose it? In other words, can a saved person ever be lost? When God gives man this new life, is he given eternal life, or is it possible to lose it? Is the preservation of the life dependent upon man, or is he kept by the mighty power of God? It is the clear teaching of the New Testament that this new life is everlasting. There are many who deny this. Let us consider the whole issue.

I. THE DOCTRINE STATED

In the theology of our day, there are two doctrines which are essentially antagonistic, mutually exclusive and destructive. They neither give nor accept quarter. Compromise is impossible. One must be true, the other must be false. What are those two doctrines?

One is the doctrine of apostasy, or falling from grace. It may be stated briefly thus: "A saint, one who has been born again, born of God, made partaker of the Divine nature, pardoned and justified, may through sin forfeit his saintship, become a child of the devil, and be finally and forever lost.

The other is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, or the security of the believer. Briefly, it may be stated thus: "A saint, one who has been born again, born of God, made partaker

of the divine nature, pardoned and justified, may do that which is wrong, grieve the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, offend Christ, the Redeemer, and God, the Loving Father, and bring himself under the corrective chastisements of the Lord, but he shall not be utterly cast down -- he shall not be lost.

To this second position, I most joyfully and gladly subscribe. This is the position of almost all Baptists, and of millions of other Christians in the world of numerous denominations. I believe that the person who has been born again is saved forever, and that nothing that he can do, or the devil can do, or that any other man can do, can ever cause him to be lost. This is the position I am asking you to consider in the light of the Word of God.

II. WHAT THE DOCTRINE DOES NOT MEAN

There are some things which are not a part of this doctrine:

1. It is no part of this doctrine that all members of the church are saved forever. All church members ought to be Christians, but I am sorry to say that apparently all church members are not Christians. John recognized this when he said in I John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Judas is an apt illustration of this truth. He was a member of the church, but nowhere does the Bible ever say that he was saved. He was associated with the disciples. He had many opportunities to give his heart to the

Lord, but he did not do so. John 6:64 says, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him." From the beginning, Judas was an unbeliever; therefore, he never was saved. Because of this, he is not an example of a person losing salvation.

It is no part of this doctrine that all members of some particular denomination will be saved. Sometimes Baptists are falsely charged with believing that only Baptists will be saved. This is as far from the truth as a statement can be. They believe the very opposite. They believe that many Baptists will not be saved, along with all others of any group who have not believed in Christ for the saving of their souls. They believe that every person in the world who has trusted Jesus Christ as his Saviour, will be saved, regardless of his denomination.

2. It is no part of this doctrine that all who are active church workers will be saved forever. Jesus spoke of such in Matthew 7:21-23. This passage is in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Notice that Jesus says to these, "I never knew you." They had worked in His kingdom. They had prophesied, they had cast out devils, and they had done many wonderful works, but they had not known the Lord. It is no part of this

doctrine of the security of the believer that every person who has done works in the name of the Lord will be saved.

3. It is no part of this doctrine that saints may not be tempted. Certainly every person who serves the Lord will be tempted. In II Peter 2:9, we read, "The Lord Knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." And in I Corinthians 10:13 we read, "God is faithful. He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Christians, even the truest and finest ones, are tempted. Satan does not leave any Christian alone. So it is not a part of this doctrine that saints will not be tempted.

4. It is no part of this doctrine that saints may not fall. In the 37th Psalm we read in the 23rd and 24th verses, these words, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand."

What, then, do we mean by the security of the believer? We mean that every person who has been born again, has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, upon repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, has everlasting life, and shall never perish. We mean that nothing he can do can separate him from Christ. If this is true, it is one of the most glorious truths this world ever has heard. Let us consider it and see that it is true.

III. THE DOCTRINE PROVED

There are so many proofs of this great doctrine that it is impossible to give them all

in one sermon. I have a sermon on forty reasons why I know that no child of God will go to hell. Every one of those reasons is from the Bible. In this message, therefore, we can only give some of them. May we consider a few:

1. God says so. God says that He gives eternal life. God says that salvation is eternal. That is the clear message of the Bible. Let us read just a few of the passages which teach this. Our text is one of them. Here we read in John 3:36 the very clear statement of the Lord, "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life." Again, in John 5:24 we read, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." In John 6:47, Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Consider John 10, beginning with the 27th verse. Jesus is speaking. He says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Would you consider that last passage? What does Jesus say? He says, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Could anything be stronger? Eternal life! If life could be possessed today, and lost tomorrow, it would not be eternal, but Jesus says it is eternal. Moreover, he says, "They shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my

hand." Let us use an illustration of a common coin purse. It is a small object which you can hold in your hand. Place it in your hand. Enclose your hand about it. How is anyone going to get that purse from you? He must be strong enough to take it from your hand. Now place your other hand over it, so that both hands are holding it. How is anyone going to get it? He must be strong enough to break the hold of both hands. Let a seal then be placed around both hands, so that they are bound, and the coin purse, representing you, is inside. This is a simple illustration of what Jesus has said. He said, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." How is the devil going to get me if I am being held in the hand of my Lord, and also in the hand of God himself, and then sealed by the Holy Spirit? He must be stronger than the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Does anyone want to argue that Satan can get one person thus held by the hand of God? Indeed, if the devil can get one, he can get all. And if he does not get all, then it is because he does not want all. It leaves us with the absurd doctrine that we would be saved by the grace of the devil, instead of the grace of God. How utterly foolish to make such an argument that the devil can get one of God's children.

These are not the only passages teaching this glorious truth. We could read the great eighth chapter of Romans, which begins, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which

are in Christ Jesus," and ends with that great mountaintop picture that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We can turn to many other passages, some of which we shall see. The Bible is filled with passages which tell us that the saved in Jesus Christ are safe forever.

2. A second argument proving the security of the believer is found in the position of the believer as it is stated in the Bible. What does that person receive who has trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour? Here are some of the things that the Bible says that he has. (I am quoting the statement and giving the reference, although for brevity's sake we'll not try to quote the references here.)

He is redeemed from under the law (Galatians 4:5), and from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13), by an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12), and he is dead to the law (Romans 7:4), and shall not come into condemnation (John 5:24). He is reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:18), and is at peace with God (Colossians 1:20). He is justified (Romans 5:1), and all trespasses are forgiven (Colossians 2:13). He has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). He has been born again of incorruptible seed (I Peter 1:23). He is a son of God (John 1:12) and has eternal life (John 5:24). He is a new creature (II Corinthians 5:17) and is perfected forever (Hebrews 10:14). He is complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). He has been accepted of God (Ephesians 1:6). He has been born of the Spirit (John 3:6) and is indwelt by the Spirit, who is to abide in the believer forever (John 14:16). He has been sealed

by the Spirit unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). He has become the object of God's love (Ephesians 2:4) and of God's grace (Romans 6:14) and of his power (Ephesians 1:19) and of his faithfulness (I Corinthians 1:9). He is a citizen of heaven (Ephesians 2:19 and Philippians 3:20), and his name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20). He is with Christ in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 2:6), and is already glorified (Romans 8:30).

These are just some of the things which the Bible says the believer in Jesus Christ possesses. Before that person, who has been saved, can be lost, every one of these things must be made void. Is that possible? God's word is absolutely silent as to any such possibility. Can one who has been redeemed by an eternal redemption be brought back into bondage? Can one who is dead to the law be made alive to it? Can one who is within the kingdom of God be taken out of it? Can one who has been born again of incorruptible seed be unborn? Can one who has been perfected forever be made imperfect? Can one who is complete in Christ become incomplete? Salvation is an eternal thing, a work of God, and it is unalterable. There is nothing in the Bible which says that God's work of redemption can be undone.

3. God's provision of eternal salvation proves the security of the believer.

(1) Before the foundation of the world, God purposed to give eternal life to his people. In II Timothy 1:19, we read, "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." And Ephesians

1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Here is a wonderful truth -- that before the foundation of the world, God purposed to give eternal life to his people.

(2) God not only purposed to give this eternal life, but he also promised it. Titus 1:2 says, "In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began." And in I John 2:25, "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." God, back in eternity, purposed to give eternal life to the believer, and then he promised it. How wonderful that such a promise could come from God!

(3) God not only purposed and promised, but now He has given that eternal life. In I John 5:11 we read, "And this is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life." We go back to our text, "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life." This is not a word that says a person has the promise of eternal life, or has the hope of eternal life. The word is that he hath eternal life. Who has it? Every person who believes. That word "hath" is an English word expressing the present perfect. It tells us of an action that was perfected in the past, that is still in force.

(4) What God purposed, promised and has given, the believer has received. John 3:36 says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."

4. Salvation is by a birth. I Peter 1:23 tells us that we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible. What happens in a birth? It is the coming into existence of new

life. A birth is not old life made over, but is new life. Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In the natural birth we receive new life. It is also true in the spiritual birth. In the natural birth we receive the natural nature. In the spiritual birth, we receive a spiritual nature, a divine nature, the nature of God. II Peter 1:4 tells us that we are the "partakers of the divine nature." The life received in a natural birth cannot cease to exist, and the life received in a spiritual birth cannot cease to exist. When can I cease to be a child of my father and mother? My own father has been dead for many years, but I am still the son of Harry Odle, and as long as I live I shall be the son of Harry Odle. Although there are no family relationships in heaven, even there, as far as the earthly existence was concerned, I was born the son of Harry Odle. When can I cease to be a child of God? Never! I am a child of God now because God is my father, and I have been born again and received his nature in that birth. It is a relationship which cannot be broken. Fellowship with God can be broken, but relationship cannot.

5. Salvation is by grace and not of works. This is a proof of the security of the believer. If our salvation depended upon our lives and our work, then we could lose it, but we are told in the Bible that it is not of works. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus." Could anything be plainer than that? There is another passage which says the

same thing -- Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." The washing of the regeneration is made clear in Revelation 1:5 where we are told that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Now this is done to us by the grace of God. It is not based upon anything that we deserve, upon any work that we've done, or any worthiness in us. It is entirely and completely by the grace of God. Since it is by God's grace and does not depend on what we do, then what we do will not change the relationship. The Bible makes this very clear.

6. The fact that God does the keeping proves the security of the believer. In I Peter 1:3-5, we read these words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The word "through" there has the meaning of "on account of." We are kept by the power of God on account of our faith. Because we believe. What are we kept for? For the full revelation of salvation, when salvation is completed in the last time. Notice that it is reserved in heaven for us, and we are kept by the power of God. I do not keep myself. You do not keep yourself. God does the keeping.

The Bible also tells us that God is able to keep us. Hebrews 7:25: "Wherefore he is able

to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And in Jude 24-25 we read, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." God is able to keep us. He has promised that He will keep us. If He does not, then He has broken that promise. But his word is that He is able and that He will. We know that He will not fail.

7. Another reason that we can be sure of the security of the believer is found in the promise of Jesus in John 6:37, where he says that he will never cast you out. Listen to his words, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." A sinner comes to Christ. He repents and believes and is saved. Jesus says that under no circumstances will he cast him out. He doesn't say, "I'll not cast him out if he remains faithful." He doesn't say, "I'll not cast him out if he doesn't fall, or if he doesn't disobey me." He says, "I will in no wise cast him out."

There is a wonderful passage dealing with this truth in the 89th Psalm, beginning with the 30th verse. "If my children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of my lips." Could there be

a stronger promise? God says we may fail, but He will not fail. We may disobey him, but his promise will be kept. We can be sure that the person who believes has eternal life.

8. The Bible tells us that nothing in heaven, nothing in earth, and nothing in hell can destroy a child of God, or take him away from God. Read the words in Romans 8:35-39. Listen to these wonderful words from this, one of the greatest chapters of the whole Bible. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are told in other places that Satan cannot separate us from God (I John 5:18). Sin cannot (Romans 6:14). Temptation cannot (I Corinthians 10:13). The world cannot (I John 5:4). How then can one be separated from God and lose his salvation?

9. There is a ninth truth that I would give and that is that no sin is charged to the believer. This is one of the most wonderful truths in all the Bible. It is so wonderful that few people who do not believe this great doctrine would dare to touch it. Romans 4:7-8. Listen to these words. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the

Lord will not impute sin." As far as sin's condemnation is concerned, it is not charged to the believer. If it were, then he would have to be saved again, but Christ would first have to die again, for the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." However, when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, our sins are laid upon Jesus. And from that moment on, every sin in our lives is charged to Him. It has to be so. Otherwise, one sin would condemn us, and we would go to hell. But our sins are not charged to us. They are laid on Him, and God no longer charges sin to us. One may argue, "Do you mean, then, that I can sin, and God will not deal with me?" Please understand the passage. Certainly God deals with his children when they sin. When a Christian sins, God deals with that sin, and chastises for that sin, but He does not send the Christian to hell for that sin, because that sin is covered in the blood of Jesus Christ. Do not take this passage as an argument for you to go out and have your fill of sin. The person who says that he wants to do that, if he believed this doctrine, needs to examine his own heart, for he has not been saved. When a person has been saved, he does not want to go out and have his fill of sin, and he is ashamed of sin, and his failures and disobedience. When he does sin, God chastises, but God does not charge one single sin to the sinner as far as the eternal punishment of that sin is concerned. Sin can break the fellowship between the believer and his Lord, but not the relationship. Sin can take away joy and happiness. It can take away power and victory and testimony and influence. The Christian will lose the rewards that God would have

him have, but he does not lose his salvation. Sin is not charged to the believer, therefore, the believer is safe and secure.

10. Let us give one last argument. We read in Romans 8:28 the words, "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord, to those who are called according to his purpose." Who are the called according to his purpose? We've already studied the fact that He purposed to provide eternal redemption. We've already studied the fact that He did provide redemption, and that men are saved by that redemption as they trust. Now this word says, that "all things work together for good" to those who thus have been called, those who love the Lord, and certainly the believer loves the Lord. Now if you have your salvation one day, and then stumble and fall and lose it the next day, is that all things working together for good? Certainly not! This passage says that ALL THINGS, so that no matter what happens, no matter what comes, no matter what temptation, no matter what trial, no matter what burden, no matter how you may stumble and fall and fail the Lord, he will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, and in the end it will be good, as you come into that eternal home which he has prepared.

IV. DISPUTED PASSAGES

I am not unmindful that there are many passages which are used to prove the doctrine of apostasy. Certainly I would not overlook the fifteenth chapter of John, and the statements in the sixth chapter of Hebrews and the tenth chapter of Hebrews and II Peter 2:20 and Galatians 5:4, but I answer that every one of

those passages interpreted in the light of the context, and in the light of the whole scriptural truth, clearly will be revealed to be preaching something else rather than the doctrine which is claimed by those who use them to prove apostasy.

Where is there anything in the fifteenth chapter of John that says that the branches are saved people? Where does it say that cutting the branches off means cutting the unsaved off? Some commentators say this, but Jesus did not say it. This passage is used for teaching this doctrine, but it is not a clear passage as related to the matter of people being saved, so how can it be used as a proof that a person loses salvation?

In the sixth chapter of Hebrews, verses 4-6, we have the statement that it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance. This passage, however, does not clearly say that these have been saved. Moreover, it says IF they shall fall away. It does not actually say that they do fall away. But the proof of the text is found in the ninth verse, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." He is clearly saying that individuals, if they could fall away after tasting these things, were not saved people. Just read the passage, and you will see that is exactly what Paul says.

The tenth chapter of Hebrews, beginning with the 26th verse, does not tell us that these

people have been saved. It states simply that here are some who have heard the message and willfully have rejected the message, and have trampled and put under foot the very thing which would be his sanctification. This passage does not say that some saved person has been lost.

Galatians 5:4 says, "Ye are fallen from grace," but a better translation is "Ye are fallen away from grace," and as you study the whole context you see that it is Judaizers who were substituting salvation by works and law, for salvation by grace, and Paul says, "Ye are fallen away from grace. You have turned from the truth and accepted some false message."

In II Peter 2:20 we read of some who have escaped the pollutions of the world through a knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, and then have gone back to the world. Read the whole chapter. It is a warning concerning apostate teachers. It does not say that a born-again person has lost his salvation.

Other passages could be discussed. Very careful study of all of them will reveal that they do not clearly, plainly teach that a saved person can be lost. Thank God, however, there are many, many passages which teach that a saved person cannot be lost, and all scripture passages must be interpreted in the light of the whole revelation of God, and not merely on the basis of their own apparent meaning. The Bible does not contradict itself.

V. CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with some brief statements concerning this glorious doctrine:

1. It is not a dangerous doctrine. This argu-

ment is made against it, that it would cause people to go out and sin if they knew that they would not be under the condemnation of God for sinning. The fallacy of this argument is that the person who has been saved is a child of God, and a child of God wants to please his Father. The fact that my mother loves me does not make me want to break my mother's heart. The fact that my father will keep me and not disinherit me does not make me want to do the things that will dishonor him and displease him. The fact that God has saved me with an eternal salvation fills my heart with joy and makes me want to do His will. It is not a dangerous doctrine. It makes us love God more. It makes us want to do His will. It makes us want to live for Him and serve Him, and when we stumble and fall, it makes us want to come to Him for forgiveness, and to try to do better in his service.

2. This glorious doctrine also makes us want to tell the good news of Christ to the whole world. We are preaching of a Saviour who saves. It is a salvation that is everlasting. We are not preaching some halfway measure. We are not preaching that which is for a moment and then fades away. We are preaching an "old ship of Zion" that will come safely into port after all the storms of life are over. Let us go tell the news to people everywhere that God offers them a glorious salvation, an eternal salvation, a salvation that cannot fail. Listen again to those words of Jesus in the fifth chapter of John and the 24th verse. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting

life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Notice these three glorious things: "Hath everlasting life," "shall not come into condemnation," "is passed from death unto life." Can any more glorious message than that be preached? Let us tell it to the whole world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A GREAT ASSURANCE GIVES PEACE OF IT

I John 5:13

Can a person who has this great new life in Christ have assurance of it? Can the Christian be sure that he is saved? Can there be perfect peace about our relationship with God? Why do some Christians have doubts, and how can they be dispelled? There are many passages in the Bible designed to provide assurance for the believer, but one entire book was written with the purpose of providing that assurance.

John wrote his books with a purpose. When we turn to the gospel of John, the 20th chapter, we read in the 30th and 31st verses these words, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." As one looks at this purpose, and then reads the gospel of John, he realizes how well John fulfilled his purpose in the book. I do not see how a person can read the gospel of John with an open mind without believing that Jesus is the Christ.

The first epistle of John also has a purpose. This is written not to those who have not believed in Christ, but to those who have believed. In the 13th verse of the 5th chapter, John says, "These things I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye

may believe on the name of the Son of God." As you read this book of I John, you find how well the author, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, has fulfilled his purpose here also. Reading the book carefully and prayerfully, you can know of the evidences which reveal whether a man is a Christian or not.

Before we look at the text, let us ask the question, "Is it possible to have assurance of salvation? Can a person know that he is saved?" Several passages of scripture give us the knowledge that a Christian can have assurance. In Isaiah 32:17, we read, "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." I Thessalonians 1:5 says, "For the gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." II Timothy 1:12 says, "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." There are many other passages in the Bible which clearly reveal that a person can have assurance. However, no passage makes this clearer than our text, for here John says, "These things have I written that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Men can know that they have eternal life, and they should know that they have eternal life. Assurance is a blessing which every Christian should have. This book tells how that he can have it.

I. A LOOK AT THE TEXT

In order to understand this passage, we must go back to the 9th verse. There we read, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of

God is greater, for this is the witness which he has testified of his Son." Much of our knowledge comes as the word of witnesses. If I ask you where you were born, the only way you can know where you were born is the word of a witness. Not one of you can remember the day of your birth. You have to accept the witness of others in order to say, "I was born in a certain place." To answer the question, "Are you an American?", your response must be based upon the word of witnesses. You cannot be sure that you were born in this nation, and as a citizen of this nation, except on the word of others. You may say, "But, I have a birth certificate." Yes, but the birth certificate is the testimony of others. All of us accept the witness of men. We must accept this witness in every relationship of our lives. Now, in this text, we read, "If we receive the witness of men," and we do, "the witness of God is greater." If we are willing to believe what our parents said, how much more can we believe what God says. If we are willing to believe what men say in the newspapers, in books, in magazines and over the radio and television, and thus believe what is happening in the world, surely we can accept what God has spoken, because God's word is so much more sure, and his word is truth. There may be falsehood in the world, but his word is truth.

Let us read further in this passage. John 5:10 says, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believed not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life

is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." How wonderful is this truth, and what a message it brings. Now, John says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." The Williams translation makes this clearer in meaning. "I have written this to you who believe in the person of the Son of God, so that you may know that you already have eternal life."

This passage reveals to whom the book is written. It is not to the unbeliever, but to the believer. It is not simply to church members, or to those who have been baptized, or to those who have reformed. It is written to those who believe on the name of the Son of God. If a person has not believed in Christ as Saviour, certainly he can have no assurance.

The text reveals that one may believe and not have assurance. Otherwise, the book has no purpose. John is writing that those who have believed may have the glorious knowledge and assurance that they are the Sons of God. What does he want us to know? First, that every person who believes has everlasting life, not just those who think they have it, but every person who believes in Christ. He wants us to know that we personally have eternal life if we believe, that we can know that it is eternal life, and he wants our faith in Christ to be strengthened by that belief. John uses the word know more than forty times in this book. It is the key word to what he is thinking and saying in this epistle.

II. WHY SOME PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE ASSURANCE

If Christians can have assurance, and many people do not have it, what is wrong? Why do they not have it? In the first place, many people who profess to be Christians are not really saved. They are trusting in the wrong thing. They have not trusted in Christ. John Wesley is an example. Evidently he had been preaching a long time before he had an experience of true regeneration. He did not have assurance that he saw others have, and it disturbed him. He met some Moravian Christians who had something that he knew that he did not have in his own heart. He learned from them, and there came a day at Aldersgate when he felt the peace of God in his heart. From that day on, John Wesley had assurance because he had Christ. A person cannot have assurance if he has not been born again. A spiritual experience with God is necessary. A person must truly be a Christian.

A person can be saved, however, and not have assurance, because of some duty omitted, or sin committed. John Bunyan expressed this in his great story, *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*, when he described the pilgrim's experiences in the Slough of Despond. What brings doubt and lack of assurance? Neglect of the Bible, and of prayer. Failure to attend the services of God's house, or to be doing what God wants you to do in Christian living. A fear to confess Christ before men will bring doubt. Doing nothing for God certainly can bring a person to a place where he wonders whether he is saved. Sin in the life, sinful deeds, sinful acts, walking with the wrong company, doing the wrong

things, can bring doubts and fears. We need to pray with the psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Sometimes doubts and fears are caused by being mixed up or confused about what the Bible teaches concerning salvation. Sometimes worry or an emotional upset may cause it. Many things can bring doubts. People need, however, to find the truths of God's word which will bring assurance and will drive the doubts away. Someone has said that feelings are not enough. We need a fact to believe, a faith to believe that fact. From a faith like that, will come the feelings, but feelings themselves are not faith, and are not salvation. We must not depend on feelings for reassurance.

III. EVIDENCES OF SALVATION

What has John written in this book? What has he said? What assurances of salvation are found here? A careful study will reveal that evidences are discussed all through the book. There are so many of them that it is difficult to outline them clearly. Nevertheless, there are some things which we can see as we study the entire book. Let us mention some of them.

1. A NEW WALK. In the 1st chapter in the 6th and 7th verses, John says, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth, but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If a person trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour, he begins a new walk. The Christian does not continue to walk in darkness. He

may sometimes stumble into darkness, but he does not stay in it. The sinner walks in darkness, loves the darkness. This does not mean complete evil or ungodliness but it means a concern only for worldly things, and the things which are not spiritual. The Christian cannot have those as his only interest. The Spirit of God in his heart makes him have a concern for things of the Spirit, and he begins to walk in that way. Are you walking in the light? Are you seeking to do God's will? Is there a desire in your heart to walk in fellowship with him? Then you are saved.

Not only is this true that we desire to walk in the Lord's way, but when we are saved, and then we fail to walk in the light, the Lord sends his chastening hand. If you are a Christian and begin to walk in sin, you cannot be happy in that sin. God will not let you be happy. He will chasten you. In the 12th chapter of Hebrews, we read in the 5th verse, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not. But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." If you can walk in sin and not have the chastening hand of God, then you are not a Christian.

Many years ago, when I was pastor in a small town, I preached on tithing. A member of the church, who was a very good friend of mine, was prospering at the time, and the tithe seemed to be a very large amount for him to give. He said to me, "I do not care what you preach,

and I do not care what the Bible says, I am not going to tithe." I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Dear friend, if you are a Christian, God is going to chasten you for your attitude. If God doesn't make you suffer because of that, then you had better search your own heart to find the way of salvation." God will not allow his child to rebel against his will without bringing His chastening rod upon him. As Christians, we walk in the light. We want to walk in the light. When we do backslide, the Lord lays his chastening hand upon us to bring us back in the right way, exactly as our parents did when we as children disobeyed. The first proof that we are the children of God is that there is a new walk.

2. A NEW DESIRE. Not only is there a new walk, but John tells us that if a person is a Christian, he has a new desire. Listen to his words in the 2nd chapter, the 3rd to 6th verses, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. Hereby know we that we are in him. He that sayeth he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Do you want to keep God's commandments? Do you want to do his will in your life? Is there in your heart a desire to make your life what he wants it to be, to serve him, to honor him? If there is no such desire, then you had better get on your knees and ask God to save you. The fact that I am a child of my mother makes me want to please my mother,

and honor her. The fact that I am married to my wife makes me love her in my heart, and because there is love, I want to do the things to please her. Because I'm a child of God, I want to do his will. I want to obey him. I want to serve him. I realize how far short I fall, how many times I disobey, but in my heart there is a desire to keep his commandments, to walk in his will and to do what he wants me to do. This is a proof that I am a child of God. The person who does not want to do the will of God is a liar, and the truth is not in him. That is the word that John says, and it is very clearly spoken to us.

3. A NEW CHOICE. In the 15th to 17th verses of the 2nd chapter of I John, we read, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world. The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." What is your choice? The things of God, or the things of the world. Which means more to you -- the world, or the work of the Lord? The above passage in one of the newer translations says, "If anyone persist in loving the world, there is no love in him for the father." Search your own heart. Do you really love God's word, love his church, and want your life to be what he wants it to be, and his will to be the first choice of your life? First in your heart is not the things of your home, the things of your business, the things of the world, but Christ.

Dr. J. B. Gambrell used to tell the story

that when two men were walking down the road together and a dog was following them, you could not always tell whose dog it was. But, he said, when you came to the forks of the road, and one man went one way and one went the other, you could tell to whom the dog belonged. He would follow his master. There come times when we must make choices, when we come to the forks of the road, when we come to decisions which differentiate from the world. When such a choice comes, which direction do you choose? If your choice is God's way, and you want to do his will, then there is assurance you are a child of God.

4. A NEW PRACTICE. The 3rd chapter of I John has been a stumbling block to some people because they have not understood its meaning. The King James Version does not make it clear. Notice these words, beginning with the 3rd verse. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning." In the 9th verse, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." When we look at the C. B. Williams translation of this amazing passage, its meaning

clearly comes to the forefront. In the 3rd verse, Dr. Williams says, "And everyone who has this hope in him tries to make himself as pure as he is." In the 6th verse, he says, "No one who continues to live in union with him practices sin. No one who practices sin has ever seen him, or come to know him." The 7th and 8th verses in Dr. Williams' translation read, "Whoever practices doing right is upright, even as he is upright. Whoever practices sin belongs to the devil." No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning, because the God-given light principle continues to live in him and he cannot practice sinning, because he is born of God. This is the way to distinguish God's children from the devil's children." Does this description concerning the practice of the Christian describe you? Do you practice sin, or is sin a grief to you when you slip and do the things you know you should not do? When you participate in those activities that you know are not pleasing to God, is there a deep condemnation, a deep concern, or are you happy in them? What is your life practice? If it is in sin, then you are not saved. But if your practice, and your desire to practice, is in God's way, and God's will then John says this is a proof that you are a child of God.

5. A NEW LOVE. The person who has been born again has a new love in his heart. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart. We read in the 4th chapter of John these words, in the 7th verse, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." Do you have love in your heart? Do you love

God's people? John specifically names that. In the 3rd chapter and the 14th verse, he says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Do you love to be with God's people? Do you love to gather in God's house? Do you love to have God's people in your home, in fellowship? Or would you rather be with the world? Where are you happiest? In a church, or in a place of worldliness and sin? Do you want to be with God's people, or would you rather be with evil men? Is it a greater pleasure to you to be where there is the preaching of the word and the fellowship of a worship service, or would you prefer to be in a place where sin and evil are? This is a proof concerning your salvation. If you do not love God's people, then you are not saved.

John goes further in this statement. He says that we cannot hate a person if we are saved. In the 2nd chapter and the 9th verse "He that sayeth he is in the light, and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now." And in the 3rd chapter, and the 14th verse, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." I do not believe that a child of God can harbor hate in his heart. I do not believe that God will allow you to hate someone if you are saved. You can become angry. You can become upset. But the love of God in your heart will somehow take away the sting and bitterness and love will soften that attitude. You cannot hate if you have love, God's love, in your heart, if you are a child of God. Here is proof -- if you are saved, you have a new love.

Furthermore, you have a concern for souls. You love those people whom God loves. There is a desire within you to see people brought to know Jesus as Saviour. This is one of the evidences of salvation, that we want to see others come to him. We love lost people, not their sins, but their souls, and want to see them come to him. All of these are proofs that we are the children of God. The love of God is in our hearts, a new love.

6. A NEW PEACE. Do you have peace with God? One of the things which is received by the Christian is peace with God. Before we were saved, the Holy Spirit did not let us have peace. He sent conviction and condemnation to our hearts to make us see our sins and our need of salvation. John discusses this in the 3rd chapter, when he says in the 19th verse, "And hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him; for if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence in God." Before you were saved, there was condemnation as you heard the message of God preached. You could not hear a sermon on salvation without feeling its pull in your own heart, that you were the one who needed to be saved. Does that still happen to you? Then you are not a Christian. The Christian does not have that conviction of the Holy Spirit, as far as his need of salvation is concerned. The Spirit of God may make him see his sins as a Christian, but it's a different conviction. If you can hear the word of God preached, if you can hear its truths brought to you, and it

doesn't bring that conviction and condemnation that it brought before you were saved, then you are saved. John said this is a proof. We have a new peace.

There are other proofs in the book. We could read of a new victory in the 5th chapter and the 4th verse. We could read of the witness of the Holy Spirit in the 3rd chapter and the 24th verse. We could read of other witnesses, but I think these are enough. We have seen that if you are a Christian you have a new walk, a new desire, a new choice, a new practice, a new love, and a new peace. Do you have these in your heart? Then you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. Paul said, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature." Here is the proof that we are saved. This is far better than some angelic messenger from heaven, or some special feeling that could come to you.

Dr. H. A. Ironside told of riding with a man near Santa Rosa, California. As they rode along, the matter of assurance was mentioned, and the man said, as he stopped the buggy, "We are not going to move until I have assurance." Dr. Ironside asked him what he expected.

"Well, I suppose that if I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'You are saved,' that I would be satisfied and know that I was a Christian."

"All right," responded Dr. Ironside, "Suppose you did hear a voice from heaven, and you went through life believing that you were saved, and then just as you were about to enter the door of death, the devil appeared to you and said, 'I was the one who spoke out and deceived you,' so you are not really saved after all."

"Well," said the old gentleman, "I guess a voice from heaven is not enough. Perhaps if

God sent an angelic messenger to speak to me and tell me I was saved, then I could be satisfied."

"Yes," said Dr. Ironside, "But suppose as you were about to enter eternity the devil came to you and in glee said 'I deceived you. I was the angel of light who appeared to you, and you are not really saved.'"

What can I do, then?" asked the man, almost in despair. "How can I have assurance?"

"Have you repented of your sins, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour?" asked the preacher.

"Oh, yes." said the man. "I know I have done that."

"Then just believe your Lord," said Dr. Ironside, "He says, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.'"

"I see it! I see it!" said the man, "and I know that I am saved."

All of us who have repented of sin and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ can accept what the Lord himself has said, and what the Word says concerning believers in so many places, and look at the Scriptural proofs in our own lives, and have assurance beyond all doubt that we are the children of God.

CHAPTER NINE

A GREAT FOUNDATION PILLARS IT

I Cor. 3:10b-11

The new life in Christ is not a mere crisis experience. It is that, but it is much more. Man actually receives the new life in a crisis experience called the new birth, but that is the foundation upon which to build a Christian life. He is a Christian and he builds a Christian life. From the scriptures we learn that we "have been saved", "are being saved", and "will be saved". Salvation is an act completed, a life being experienced, and a future anticipated.

Our emphasis in this message concerns the life which is to be lived, the salvation which is a daily experience, the Christian life which is to be built. For a Scripture background, I wish to use a passage which evidently I am using out of context, and yet I am not so sure. The application appears to refer to preachers, yet it is true of every Christian.

In the larger Scripture passage, Paul reveals the wonderful truth that we are builders. Here it seems clear that he is talking to preachers, for he is discussing those who have labored in the Corinthian church. He calls the church "God's husbandry," "God's building." He speaks of himself as the master builder who has laid the foundation, and warns others that they take care how they build thereon. After giving his strong assertion that there is no other foundation, he speaks of the types of material, of the testing time, and of the results and reward.

Paul is speaking of preachers, but do not his words have a much larger meaning? If preachers are builders upon the foundation of Christ, are not other Christians also? If preachers' works are to be tested, will not the works of all Christians be tested as well? Is not Christ the foundation of all? It seems that here is one of the great truths concerning the living of the Christian life. The Christian is a builder, and must build a Christian life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, upon that glorious foundation which he has found, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I. THE FOUNDATION

There is only one foundation for a Christian life. That is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. One cannot build a Christian life without this foundation.

1. There are many substitute foundations which are offered. Satan would lead men to believe they can have a Christian life without having Christ, but it is not so. There are those who try to build a Christian life on a foundation of church membership. They have been misled into believing that if they were taken into a church when they were babies, or if they have united with a church later in life, that somehow that will save them and give them the basis for a Christian life. How tragic that so many people have been deceived into believing this. Many in the world have no other hope, than that sometime, as a baby, a few drops of water were sprinkled upon them and they were enrolled on a church membership book. Perhaps at some later time they had what is called confirmation or some other religious ceremony. Upon this they base their Christian

hope. They know of no personal relationship with Christ. Nowhere or no time is to them the point where, by a personal faith, they accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour of their souls.

Still others seek to build upon a foundation of baptism, and participation in observance of the Lord's Supper. They have been taught that if they were baptized, or even had only that which men call baptism, that somehow it washed away their sins and made them subjects for heaven. Some have been taught that immersion by a certain church saved their souls. Others believe that because a priest intoned a few words over them as water was sprinkled upon them when they were babies, they are children of God, and that if they meet all of the other conditions set down by their church, they will somehow enter heaven.

Still others believe that their salvation depends upon their works. They feel that somehow a good life must be added to all that God's grace has done, and that if they fail to live a life of good deeds, they can "fall from grace," and cease to be the children of God.

How tragic it is that people believe that such foundations are the means of eternal life, and the basis for a Christian life. Are these not the spider's webs and cockatrice's nests" spoken of by the prophet in Isaiah 59:5-6, or the "broken cisterns" of Jeremiah 2:13? They will hatch out death instead of life, they are garments that will not cover, and they are cisterns that will not hold water. Well does Proverbs say "There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Truly does this passage say "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus

Christ."

2. The prophet of old announced that God would lay a foundation. In Isaiah 28:16 we read "Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." Numerous New Testament passages reveal that Christ is that foundation, the "chief corner stone," etc. The words in this Scripture passage make emphatically clear that Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, is the foundation, and there can be no other. This is strengthened by the words of Acts 4:12 where we read "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Jesus spoke of the right foundation and the wrong foundation when he spoke of house-building in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus Christ himself is the one foundation. One simply cannot build a Christian life upon anything else.

II. THE BUILDING

One can have the finest foundation in the world and then build nothing upon it. He can dig deep in the earth, pour the strongest concrete and put in the finest steel, and then upon that build either a skyscraper or a chicken coop. The foundation is necessary for the erection of the right kind of building, but the foundation does not make the building, nor does a good foundation guarantee a good building.

After foundations are laid, buildings must be erected upon them. So it is with the Christian life. One becomes a Christian through accepting Jesus Christ. This is not, however, the end of the Christian life. It is just the beginning. Upon that right experience and rightful relationship

the right kind of life must be built. One can have a good birth, and live a poor life. Merely looking at the Christian world reveals the truth of this in the spiritual realm. Of course, we fully recognize that not every person who is a church member, or even claims in some manner to be a follower of Christ, is a true Christian. However, it is very evident that there are some truly born again persons, who have grown very little spiritually. They remain mere babes in Christ. To return to the figure of our text, they have found the right foundation, but they have not built a great life upon it. As some one has said, we have many 'bantam Baptists, midget Methodists, peewee Presbyterians, and lilliputian Lutherans.' All of these underscore the fact that a mere profession of faith in Christ does not guarantee a great Christian life.

Nevertheless, great Christian lives can be built. Look at the scores of outstanding Christians who come to mind as one considers this fact. God has provided the means for every Christian to build a great life. . . not necessarily great by the world's measurement, but certainly by God's measure. Every Christian who grows up into the fullness of Christ as God purposes, will have a great Christian life, whether the world ever hears of it. And every Christian should purpose to do just that. May we all say, "I must build the kind of life God wants me to have."

III. THE MATERIAL

Paul discusses the material with which the builder builds. I Cor. 3:12-13, "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall

declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." The materials are of two types, the permanent and the temporary. Gold silver and precious stones are lasting materials. They stand the test of time. They will stand the test of fire. Even under the terrific heat of the furnace they are not destroyed. Only the dross and impurities are removed.

Not so with wood, hay or stubble. Time takes its toll and they rot away. Fire takes its toll and nothing but ash is left. They are not lasting.

It is evident that Paul is speaking of the building materials the Christian has in a figurative manner. Men can build of these materials that last, or they can build of that which will not stand when the testing time comes.

IV. THE TESTING AND THE RESULTS

The fire shall try the building material, says Paul. This, too, is figurative. Evidently he has no reference to fires of hell, but only the testing of the works of the Christian's life. The day comes when his work is tested to see what sort it is.

Have you lived for Christ? Have you used your talents for Him? Have you made your investment in the eternal? Or have you refused to do his will? Have you kept your money to yourself, and made no everlasting investments? Have you wasted your life, your talents, and your time? Have you lived for self instead of for God? Have you neglected the church? Have you been so busy with the pleasures and treasures of the world, that you had no time for God?

The testing time is coming, when every work will be proved in the crucibles of God. Where will you stand in that day? An amazing statement

is found here. We read that if a man's work abide the testing, he shall receive a reward, but if it does not stand the testing, he shall suffer loss, yet he himself shall be saved. A saved soul but a lost life. A soul in heaven, but no rewards. Rich are the rewards and crowns which God has for the faithful. Think of getting into heaven, and receiving none of these.

One may say, "Well, I'll be satisfied just to get into heaven." No you will not be satisfied. When you stand in glory, and see others receiving the Master's well done, and he says to you, "Why did you not serve me? Why did you not use your money and talents for me?" What will you say? Will you not look back with shame on a wasted life?

A Christian can have a glorious foundation, and then build a great life upon it, or he can have the same foundation, and build nothing upon it. The foundation is essential for the building, but it does not make the building. The right kind of structure must be erected upon that foundation.

I remember two men in my early pastorate. They were saved about the same time. One of them immediately entered into the activities of the church. He began to serve in every way that he could. He established a family altar in his home. He became a witness for the Lord. His spiritual development was clearly evident, and soon the church began to use him, and he became a great leader. The other man did not join the Sunday school. He was not regular in church attendance. He did not become a tither, and a witness for the Lord. There was no great growth. Occasionally he attended the services, but that was all. One grew into a glorious Christ-

ian, the other merely a nominal one. What was the difference? One built upon his foundation, while the other did not. Will they both get into heaven? Yes, I think so, for I think both were truly saved. One, however, will receive rewards and riches for his Christian life, while the other will be saved "so as by fire."

V. WHAT ARE MEN BUILDING THAT HELP BUILD A CHRISTIAN LIFE?

There are several things that men build as they labor for the Lord in the Christian life.

1. Every Christian is building a Christian life itself. The Christian life is that life which is lived from the day of one's conversion, to the day of death or translation into glory. It is all of the years and months and weeks and days that one lives, and all that his life adds up to in that period.

A Christian can grow a spiritual life. He can so live that he allows the Spirit to fill his life and use it. He can become Godly in character, and Christlike in daily living. His prayer and Bible study can make his life winsome. The Spirit will fill his life with the fruits of the Spirit "love, joy, peace, etc."

A Christian can build a dedicated life. The appeal of God is that we "present our bodies, a living sacrifice." A Christian can do that. He can give his best to God. The Lord's work can become first in his life.

A Christian can build a useful life. Every Christian has a talent. Many have more than one. Some can speak for God, and others can sing for God. Some have a talent to organize for God, to visit for God, or handle business for God. There are so many places of service

in the church, that every Christian can be busy for God as he is building a Christian life.

2. Every Christian can build a Christian home. There is no greater need today than Christian homes. Christians need Christian homes. Lost people in the family need Christian homes. Children need Christian homes. Christian parents can build Christian homes. Where only one of the parents is saved, he can at least bring the Christian witness into the home.

What is essential to the building of a Christian home? Christ must be enthroned. Sin must be ruled out. Love must be lived. Christian living must be practiced. The family must worship together and work for God together. Christian fellowship must be practiced.

What a blessing Christian homes have been to the world. Many a person has been led to Christ, or held near to God in times of deep distress or great temptation by the influence of a Christian home. Christian homes do not just happen, they must be built.

One of the great stories of the influence of a Godly home comes from Dr. Forest Feezor, former Executive Secretary of Texas, and before that, pastor of Columbus Avenue Church in Waco. Many students at Baylor University attend the church. Dr. Feezor tells the following story concerning an experience with a young student from Baylor.

"It was Monday morning. The following Sunday the congregation, in single file, would march to the front of the sanctuary and place their stewardship commitment cards in a little miniature church building. Careful and detailed preparations were in process that Monday morning. Then there came a telephone call from a Baylor

University student asking for a conference. The impulse was to decline the request due to the budget preparations. Quite often a student with some love affair wanted a conference not so much for advice as for confirmation.

It was indicated the student might come if he would do so at once. So five minutes later he was in the church office. One would rarely, if ever, look upon a finer young man in appearance and bearing. His complexion was ruddy and he was winsome.

The conversation was opened by his raising the question about the pledge he planned to make next Sunday. He began with this problem by saying that he was a tither and that his income varied some from month to month and that in making his pledge he did not want to get the budget out of balance. Inwardly the thought passed me, 'Son, you won't get the budget out of balance with your tithe.' He was only a freshman in the University. Then in confidence he told me his income was between five and eight thousand dollars per month. Thus informed I thought 'Say! That would get the budget out of line.'

"My advice was that he pledge what he knew was the minimum and if the tithe was more some months it would simply strengthen the budget. To this he agreed. By this time my interest in the lad had deepened considerably. Upon saying to him, 'You look happy this morning,' he replied, 'I am. I have just heard from the dean and for the quarter I have all A's.' My curiosity increased. 'Where do you room?' 'Brooks Hall,' he said. 'Do you have a car?' I asked. 'I have an old one. Mother bought a new one, I have the old model.' 'Who taught you to tithe?' 'My father,' he said, 'And who taught him?' To

which he replied, 'His father, my grandfather. He was a poor man in Oklahoma. But he told daddy all of us should give at least a tithe, the tenth, to the Lord. Later my father struck oil in Oklahoma. He is dead now and I'm the only child and this monthly income is my part of the estate.' 'When did you first tithe?' He said, 'I had a newspaper route making \$2.50 per week. Twenty-five cents was given to the Lord through His Church.' 'Is it harder to tithe now with \$5000 to \$8000 per month than it was with a quarter?' His reply was, 'Now the devil tells me just look how much money you are giving away.' 'What do you tell him?' 'Just look how much I have left.'

"When he was gone these thoughts went through my mind. This lad with \$5000 to \$8000 per month income is making all 'A's'. He is rooming in the least expensive dormitory Baylor has, he is using a second hand car and is one of the most modest and clean cut young men I have met. Had he not been taught stewardship none of this would obtain. Perhaps he would have been in the most elaborate apartment available, driving a new car of the most expensive make and flunking half, if not all, his subjects. His first month as a member, I really peeked on him. He gave \$560.00 to the Lord through his church.

"He is now a successful business man in West Texas, a teacher of a boys' class, and his pastor told me, 'He is one of our finest and most consecrated men.'

"From this experience my conclusion is that stewardship and character go together." It is also a perfect picture of the product of right teaching in a home.

3. Christians build the church, and as they build the church they build themselves. The church should be first in their lives. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." While He was here the Lord established His church. To the church He gave the gospel, the commission, the ordinances, the doctrines, and left it to be His witness in the world through the ages.

Churches are built by men. Great churches appear because men have made them great. Pastors have a part but also the laymen have a part. One thinks of George W. Truett and W.A. Criswell when he thinks of First Baptist Church, Dallas, but a second thought makes him remember that behind these men were multitudes of faithful, godly, praying, working, giving men, women and young people.

We build the church as we give to it our time and talents, influence and love, service and support. As we support the church, attend the services, serve in the organizations and support the program with tithes and offerings, we are building the church. And as we do, we build ourselves. Giving our all to build his church, we find our own hearts and lives being builded.

4. Christians can be builders of the kingdom. Now we are thinking of the great world program of the Lord. Perhaps its clearest manifestation to us is the great denominational programs in which we participate. Think of the Christian educational institutions, the denominational hospitals and orphanages, and the vast mission programs, in the state, the nation and to the ends of the earth.

Denominational programs do not grow spontaneously. They are built from the love and

prayers and concern and support of the people in the churches. As individual Christians we can support these programs. We can study about them, pray for them, and give to them. We can teach our children about them, and pray that God will call some of our own children to share in the program to the ends of the earth. As we do this, our own spiritual lives grow and our own building is being erected on the foundation of Christ.

5. The Christian can help build a community and a nation. How often we have wished and prayed that our nation, and our community could be truly Christian. How can it become that? There are enough Christians in the average community to make it feel a mighty Christian influence. Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." What effect are our lives having on our community? Cannot Christian business men, and Christian officials, and Christian professional men, and Christian teachers, and Christian homes make a community Christian in its atmosphere? What is your life, my life, doing in its influence on the community where we live?

I heard an amazing and thrilling story sometime ago when I was in Denver. I was told of a Baptist deacon in one of our Baptist churches in that city, who had developed a large shopping center in one of the burgeoning suburban areas of that city. On the day that representatives of the various firms sat around a table with the developer, the banker, and the attorney, to sign contracts for the business which would be located there, suddenly one of the men spoke up while reading the leases, and said, "Wait a minute, there is something in this which will

have to come out. This is something which ordinarily is not found in such a lease." Interest was aroused up and down the table, as many said, "What? What?" The first man replied, "I read here the words 'No alcoholic beverages can be sold by this establishment during the life of this lease.' Sir, I will not sign with that statement in the lease. You will have to take it out." Others began to nod heads or speak out in assent.

The Baptist deacon who was developing the project, arose from his seat and said, "Sirs, I know that that statement is in the lease, and that it is unusual, but it is there because I asked my attorney to put it there. He advised against it, but I required him to include it."

"Now, gentlemen, my option on this property will soon expire, and this whole program with all that I already have in it may fall through, but I will not take that clause out of the lease. If this shopping center is built it will be with that requirement. If I were to take it out, I do not think that I could bear to face my little daughter as I go home tonight, and she comes running to meet me. I would not be able to face my Sunday school class of boys next Sunday morning, or attend the deacon's meeting next Tuesday night. Indeed, I fear that I would not even be able to get on my knees tonight and face God as I pray. No, gentlemen, if you sign the lease it will be with that clause. If you feel that you cannot do so, then you may return the lease to my attorney, and thank you for your trouble." With that, he left the room.

Some of those present turned to the attorney saying that he could make him take it out, but he stated that he was powerless to do so.

One turned to the banker, who was a Baptist deacon, from Tulsa, Oklahoma, (and who told the story), but he replied that he was lending the man the money on the basis of his Christian character, and if he took the clause out after first putting it in, he would not let him have the money.

The men talked further, and then one said, "I do not know why I am so concerned. My firm is not in the liquor business, nor will it ever be. Moreover, we like to do business with a man of character. Evidently this man has that. I am going to sign." One after another they gave assent, and the leases were signed. Today there stands in Denver a fine shopping center where alcoholic beverages will never be sold, simply because a Christian man had some strong convictions. I understand that he now has developed similar centers in other major cities. Think of the Christian influence of that man, and the Christian life he is building.

Yes, all of us are builders. As we build other things, we are building our own lives. As we build them we are using the materials which are eternal, materials that will stand when the testing time of God comes, materials and buildings which will bring the Lord's rewards and His "well done."

What kind of Christian life are you building? Is it not time to begin erecting the right kind of building on that foundation today, if you are not already doing so?

CHAPTER TEN

IT'S A GREAT LIFE--DON'T MISS IT

Hebrews 2:1-3

The most important thing which any human being can do is to accept the new life in Christ, the salvation which God has provided. This is the eternal purpose of God. This is the reason that Jesus Christ left glory, took upon him the form of a man, died on the cross, conquered death, went back to glory and is coming again. This is the message of the church. This is the central truth of the Bible. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the first need of every individual in the world. Salvation is the greatest possession a person can have in this world. It is the most important thought ever to enter into the mind and heart of men.

Yet, there is a great and terrible truth. Not all men are going to be saved. Some people are going to be lost. The road that leads to eternal destruction is broad and Jesus said that "many" will be on that road. This is not because God wills that any person shall be lost. Neither, does it mean that salvation is not available to all men, nor that all men will not be received if they do come to Christ in repentance and faith. Yet, multitudes will be lost and be turned into hell. Why?

The text which we have chosen as the basis of this message tells us why. It presents three great facts which we must face. In these verses we find these three things: 1. The great and awful fact that sin is punished. 2. The great and

glorious salvation which God has provided so that men may escape the punishment of sin. 3. The great and terrible fact that people may lose this salvation, simply by neglecting it.

Let us consider these three facts.

I. THE GREAT AND AWFUL TRUTH THAT SIN IS PUNISHED

The text says "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward."

1. This principle is a natural law . . a law of nature. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If a man sows wheat he expects to reap wheat; if he sows corn, he looks to the fall and the gathering of the corn; if he plants a garden, he expects to harvest the food for his table. When he plants cotton seed, he looks to the day when his fields are white, ready for the harvest. If a man neglects his fields, or disregards the laws of harvest; if he allows the weeds and gullies and briars to take over, simply by neglect, he will receive the just recompense for his actions.

2. This principle also is the law of the courts. When an individual chooses the way of evil; when he chooses to disobey the laws of man and of God; when he disregards the way of right and enters into that which is evil, there can be only one result. A pay day comes. Dr. Robert G. Lee has made famous the truth of sowing and reaping, by his sermon, "Pay Day, Some Day." Every day we see it in the courts of our land. Thousands of men and women are behind bars, or are even in eternity, because they failed to recognize that our actions receive a just recompense of reward.

3. That which is the law of nature and of man, also is the law of God in the spiritual realm. When man disobeyed God's command in the Garden of Eden, the awful penalty of death, eternal death came upon him. In the law of Moses the truth is made very clear, and penalties were visited upon those who broke God's law. Jesus continually warned men that sin would be punished. He told men that it would be better to have the evil hand cut off, than to go on in its sin, and end up in Hell. He revealed the wrath of God against sin, and warned men to flee from it.

This likewise was the message of John the Baptist, of the apostles, of Paul and other New Testament writers. The entire New Testament, yes, the entire Bible reveals that sin will be punished. We cannot explain away, nor reject such passages as "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23); "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15). "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:4). There are many more passages which teach this. These are enough. The Word of God says it, and human experience proves it. Sin is punished. Listen to Revelation 21:8, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murders, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Yes, here is a great and awful truth "Sin is punished." But, there is a second truth in our text. Let us look at that.

II. THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS TRUTH THAT SALVATION IS PROVIDED

While it is true that sin is punished, it is also true that God has provided salvation from sin. This text speaks of it as a "great" salvation. Indeed, it is called "so great" salvation. The word salvation is used again and again in the Bible. Hundreds of times it appears in the New Testament. Numerous times it is mentioned in Hebrews.

Here the Holy Spirit leads the writer to speak of it as "so great." We are reminded of the words in John 3:16, "so loved." It means that God's love and salvation is so great that it cannot be measured, so great that it is above all else.

What do we mean by salvation? It has been defined as "All that God does for man in delivering him from the consequence of sin, conforming him to the image of His son, and in bringing him into a perfect union with Himself and His son." (Strombeck).

Salvation is great, . . . greater than anything else in the world, greater than home, greater than love, greater than success, greater than happiness, greater than power, greater than riches . . . greater than all of the world's treasures and glories put together.

Why is this true? Why is salvation the greatest thing in the world?

1. It is great salvation because of its PROVIDOR
--- the eternal God.

Back in the council halls of eternity God purposed and planned this eternal salvation. In His omniscience God foresaw man's need for redemption. In his omnipotence He purposed and planned it. In His love He provided for it.

Here is the greatest act of God in all eternity. Not creation, not the sun, moon and stars, put in their places, not even the creation of man, these were not the greatest acts of God. It was man's RE-CREATION, REGENERATION, REDEMPTION, and all else that God's grace has provided in salvation. This is the greatest act of the eternal God.

2. It is a great salvation because of its
PRICE

In this world we often value things by their cost. We pay a high price for an object, and it becomes highly valuable to us. We recognize that those things which are of highest value by the world's standards are usually things which cost very dearly. Our freedoms, our heritage in our nation, came to us at a great and terrible price. Men died that we might live. Battle fields were left strewn with precious lives, in order that freedom might exist in the world. We value it because of its cost.

Even by this standard we can see that the greatest thing of all is salvation. Nothing else in the world was ever so costly.

It cost the eternal God His only begotten Son. "God so loved the world that He gave His Son." Through all eternity that Son had been with him, yet He sent Him into the world to live, yea, to die. . . even to be separated for the first time. Yes, it cost God His Son. Once, long ago, I talked to a man about his soul. I told him of God's love and how that God gave His Son. In this room sat the man's only child, a fine lad. I said to him, "Do you love me enough to give your son to die for me?" He did not have to think long. "No" he answered, "I think a lot of you, but I could not give my son . . . not

his life . . . not lose him . . . not be separated from him, not for you, nor for anyone else."

"But," I answered quickly, "God gave His only Son for you. In His great love for your soul, He did that." This man of long ago, saw it, and the Spirit of God broke his heart as he thought of it, and quickly he was accepting God's free gift.

It cost the Lord Jesus Christ heaven itself, with all of its glory. It cost him a life among men, with all of its suffering and pain, sweat and tears. It cost him the agony of the cross, and his was not merely a martyr's death. On the cross Christ bore the sins of the whole world. All of the sins of men were laid upon Him and then the wrath of God was loosed upon Him as the sinbearer. Only eternity will reveal to us the meaning of His words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely he was facing eternal death . . . separation from God . . . dying for sin. No greater price has ever been paid in this world.

This salvation cost the Holy Spirit the rejections and rebuffs of the ages. It cost the disciples the suffering, and even death of martyrdom. Our fathers paid a price through the ages that we might know the message. There is a trail of blood, and even today, men are dying, that this message might be proclaimed.

Yet the salvation comes to us without cost. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." There is no price that we can pay . . . not money . . . not works . . . not life . . . not prayers . . . not anything. We simply come to Christ in repentance and faith and receive this wondrous gift of God.

3. It is a great salvation because of its
PROVISION

By this we mean its content, its meaning. When one receives this great salvation, many things happen to him. In that moment of being born again one receives all that God provides instantly, and all the promises of that which is to come in this world and in the world to come. In another message we have seen what God provides in this. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Salvation is past, it is present, it is future. It begins in that moment of new birth, it continues through life and it will be consummated in glory. It saves from an awful hell; it saves to a blessed life; it saves to a glorious eternity. Nothing that can come to man is so wonderful as is this salvation God has provided.

4. It is a great salvation because of its POWER

Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation." And how great is the power of God in the life of man as salvation changes and re-makes him. Paul the enemy of Christ, breathing out hatred and bitterness, suddenly becomes the apostle and witness of Christ, as salvation makes him a new man. How often has the drunkard been made sober, the thief made honest, the liar made truthful, the filthy made clean, the dead made alive, by God's power in the heart. The gap of separation between God and man is removed, . . . sin; the worst enemy is overcome . . . death; the greatest need of man is met . . . life.

5. It is a great salvation because it is
PERPETUAL

This is a salvation which is everlasting. It is not the work of a day, that fades in the night.

It is not something temporary, fleeting, or that can be lost in careless unconcern. God's salvation is eternal. ". . . should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is "an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

6. It is a great salvation because it is PROFFERED to all.

Here is a salvation great enough to save the greatest sinner in the world. Its scope is wide enough to reach all men, everywhere, in all ages. The invitation is, "Whosoever will may come." The plan is so simple that any sinner on earth may come . . . simply on repentance and faith.

III. THE GREAT AND TRAGIC FACT THAT MEN CAN MISS THIS GREAT SALVATION

This is one of the most tragic truths in the world. God has provided a great and glorious salvation for sinful men. Yet, men can miss it. Men who need it more than anything else they ever can have, can miss it, with all that that means. It means that they miss the grace and love of God in all of its riches. They miss all that God does for the saved person in this world. They miss the presence of God when they come face to face with death and eternity. They miss the deliverance from the wrath of God as they stand at the judgment. They miss the glorious entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord. They miss all the riches and glory of heaven for eternity. All of this and all else that salvation means, any person can miss.

How can such riches be missed? Does a

man have to hate the Bible, the church, the preacher, or God Himself? No! Does he have to oppose all of these things of God, and join with the opposition to them? Does he have to be holding on to some great and terrible sin, that he deliberately chooses instead of the gift of God? No, none of these!

All that a person has to do to miss God's great salvation is simply to neglect it! Just do nothing about it! Just be too busy at other things, to take time to consider the needs of his soul. It can be illustrated by the simple story of a sick man with medicine that can save his life. The doctor tells him that if he takes that medicine every four hours he will live, but if he fails to take it he will die. What does the man have to do to die? Nothing! He does not have to hate the doctor. He does not have to despise the medicine. He does not have to throw the medicine out the window, or pour it down the drain. All he has to do is to neglect to take it, and he will die.

What does a man have to do to be lost? Nothing. Just do nothing. Just neglect to come to Christ as Saviour. Just neglect to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Never shall I forget a man whom I knew in one of my early pastorates. I shall call him John, but that was not his name. His family were members of the church. I had baptized his children. Often I had been a guest in his home. Occasionally he heard me preach, and many times I talked to him about trusting Christ. Again and again he said to me, "Now preacher don't you worry about me. I am not going to hell. I will settle this before it is too late. If you want me to keep coming to hear you, just

let me alone. I'll settle things with God in my own good time." In vain I tried to persuade him that he had no guarantee that always there would be plenty of time. I tried to show him that God's word says, "Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation," and that there was no promise concerning tomorrow. But my efforts were in vain. He continued to put the matter off.

I was in a revival meeting about fifty miles from my home, when one morning I picked up the daily newspaper, and read that John had been in a serious accident in the plant where he worked, and was lying unconscious in the hospital. Before I finished reading the paper, the phone rang, and my wife told me that John was dead, and I was asked to return home for the funeral service the next day. It was one of the most difficult funerals I ever tried to preach. I knew of not the slightest word of hope which I could speak. I had to speak to the living. After the message, as was the custom there in those days, the audience filed by the open casket. Last to come was the family. I stepped down to the head of the casket to stand there as the wife and children came there. As I stood there, this dear Christian wife leaned over and kissed the forehead of the body, and said in a low voice, "Goodbye, John, forever." Forever, forever, and it was so needless. A Christian family, Christian friends, the influence of a Christian church, and even the call of God in his own heart, but he neglected, and, as far as we know, died without hope.

Men can lose health, can lose wealth, can lose life itself, by neglect and carelessness. "Foolish" the world says. But are you not more fool-

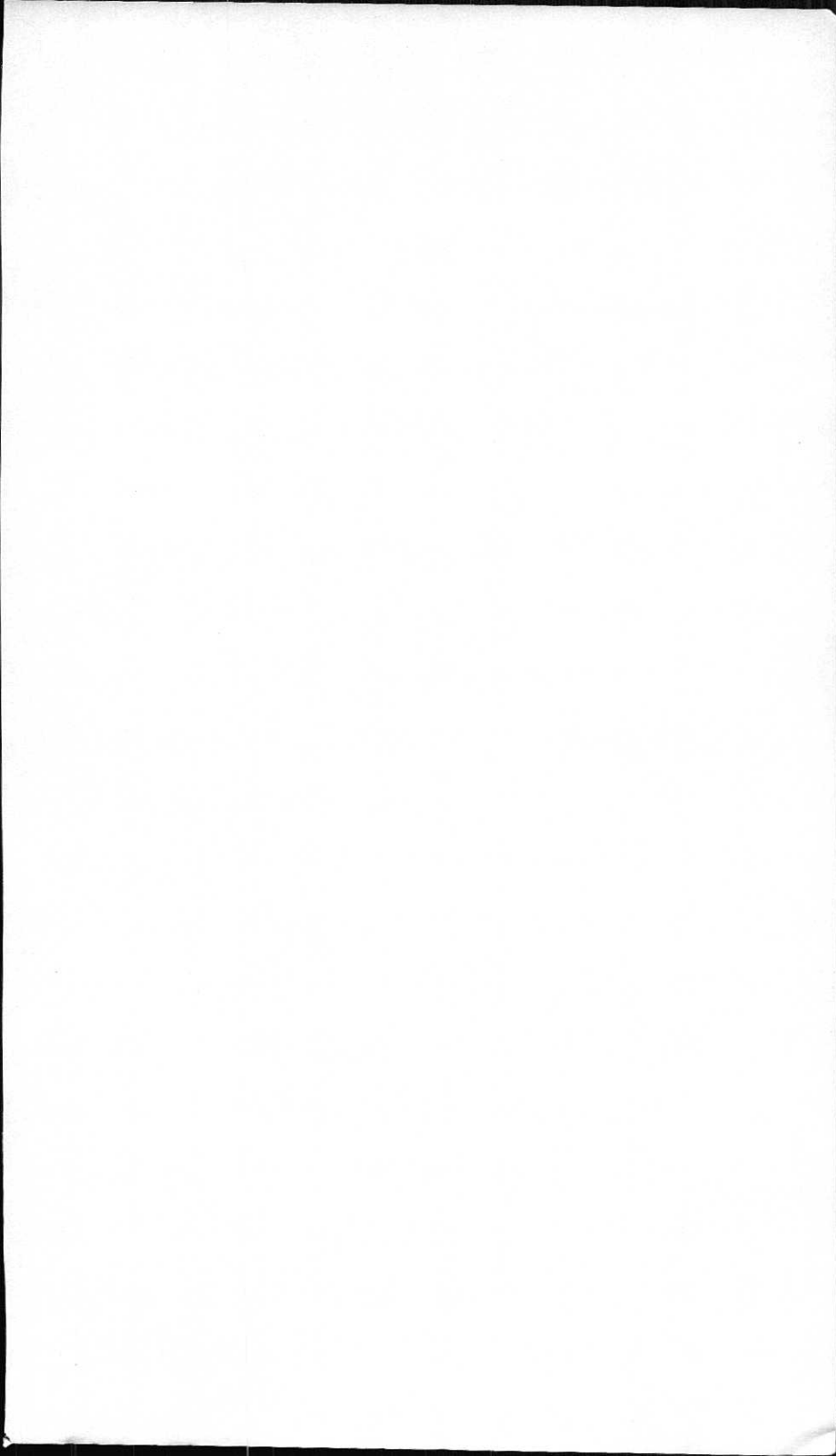
ish when you neglect your soul?

Let us add an additional fact to the three we have seen in our text.

IV. THE GLORIOUS FACT THAT I CAN RECEIVE THIS GREAT SALVATION AS MY OWN THIS VERY DAY

Every sinner is invited to receive this great salvation as God's free gift. It cannot be earned. It cannot be purchased. It cannot be bestowed by a priest or preacher. It is not earned by religious act or works. It is simply God's free gift, bestowed by God's grace upon the sinner when he repents and believes.

It is offered to all. No sinner is too great. No person is too far from God. Whosoever will may come. This is the call of God and of the church. Here is God's great salvation, the greatest act of God for all eternity. It is offered to the sinner, any sinner, anywhere. When the sinner comes in repentance and faith, he will not be turned away.



FACTS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Odle is an ordained Southern Baptist minister, who spent many years as a pastor, and for the past eight years has been editor of The Baptist Record, the official journal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. He is author of Church Member's Handbook, a book which has been widely used among Southern Baptists, with almost 1,400,000 copies having been printed, and editions published in Spanish and Chinese.

SOME OF THE MANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THIS BOOK:

- * What is the great life which God offers to men?
- * Why was it necessary for Christ to die on a cross in order to save lost men?
- * What happens to a sinner when God saves him?
- * Is salvation an experience, a life, or a hope?
- * Can a saved person ever lose his salvation?
- * Can a person be sure that he is saved?
- * Why do some Christians not have assurance?
- * What does a person have to do in order to miss this great life?